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Hoop Dreams Hollywood dreams

by Murray Sperber

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Of all Hollywood products, sports movies are particularly genre driven. From the classical studio biopics on Lou Gehrig and Knute Rockne (PRIDE OF THE YANKEES, KNUTE ROCKNE: ALL AMERICAN) to revisionist baseball and football films (BULL DURHAM, NORTH DALLAS FORTY), as well as such parodies as MAJOR LEAGUE and SLAPSHOT, Hollywood has portrayed athletes as conquering heroes or bums (often lovable and/or redeemable), triumphing over impossible odds (ROCKY) or throwing fights (BODY AND SOUL), fulfilling various American dreams (FIELD OF DREAMS) or violating them (EIGHT MEN OUT), and almost always enveloped in a very conservative ideology.

In recent years, sports films have increasingly mixed genre forms—they use a revisionist cynicism about some aspects of big-time athletics but then undercut it with traditional plot lines, heroes, and love stories, e.g., THE PROGRAM and NECESSARY ROUGHNESS. At some point in the mixed genre movies, the social critique evaporates and the classical form prevails. Thus, the one constant in almost all sports movies is the adherence to formulaic themes, predictable narratives, easily recognized iconography, and, above all, conservative ideology. (Only the brilliant and totally revisionist RAGING BULL broke new ground and immediately distinguished itself from every other sports film ever made.)[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

Unlike most fiction movies, with their generic formulas and knee-jerk emotions, documentary films strive for more realistic representations and responses. Since the Lumière brothers' ARRIVAL OF A TRAIN, documentarists have sought authenticity and have wanted the images to shape the viewers' emotions. Of course, documentary filmmakers have tended to shape their material—the decisions on what to shoot, how to shoot and edit are highly subjective and potentially intrusive — but the goal has been authenticity, the capturing of the "privileged moment" when the filmmaker reveals the subject as close to "real life" as possible and the audience responds directly to this representation. When a documentary succeeds, it has a power that few fiction films attain.[2]

No documentary in the last decade has attracted the critical praise, controversy, as well as box office and video dollars that the 1994 movie, HOOP DREAMS, has

gained. Three Chicago filmmakers, Frederick Marx, Steve James, and Peter Gilbert, immersed themselves in the lives of two talented African-American basketball players, and followed their subjects, Arthur Agee and William Gates, from the eighth grade to college entrance. The success of the film — indeed, its very form — reveals much about present-day United States, its politics, and the mediated culture in which we live.

Journalists, including newspaper film reviewers, tend to love the film and to accept it at face value. A typical comment appeared in a review in the *Albany (NY) Times Union*: "While it stays loyal to the documentary's just-the-facts form, HOOP DREAMS unfolds more like its popular cinematic cousin, the narrative film. Characters evolve. A plot develops. There's a dramatic high point, even a surprise ending." [3] This reviewer naively accepts the "objective" facade of the film but, unwittingly, points to the fact that in spite of almost three hours of documentary footage, HOOP DREAMS is a genre driven product, mixing elements of the classical and revisionist forms. Moreover, because of its "star" characters and upbeat ending, its form is highly recognizable and comforting to audiences.

Indeed, for all of the filmmakers' claims about recording the objective truth of the lives of young African-American basketball players in the ghetto, the fame of the film has turned the spotlight — as well as a lawsuit — on them, and revealed their actual methods and agenda. [4]

William Gates, one of the two main characters, candidly told an interviewer that, in the beginning, the filmmakers "came to us with an idea. Basically, it was, 'Hey, we've got this story. Would you guys mind having us follow you around for awhile.'" The story was how the fantasy of playing big-time basketball captures the lives of poor, young blacks and propels them into a corrupt rat race where ruthless adults, mainly white — street agents, high school and college coaches — manipulate them for their own ego and monetary ends. [5]

The filmmakers pursued their story relentlessly and spent a number of years and miles of film on it. In addition, they employed a ruthlessness worthy of the agents and coaches whom they condemn. Early on in the film, they introduce Gene Pingatore, the coach of a wealthy suburban school, St. Joseph's of Westchester, Illinois, who wants desperately to win a state basketball championship. They also show street agent Earl Smith searching the Chicago ghettos for young, promising b-ball talent, then helping arrange for Agee and Gates to attend St. Joseph's and play for Pingatore.

However, the filmmakers — according to their admission in the lawsuit that they settled out-of-court — in convincing the school and the coach to allow them to shoot on its premises and in all situations involving Agee and Gates, "misrepresented the nature of their work as not-for-profit." The lawsuit also charged that "the film was not an accurate reflection of St. Joseph High School or its staff or students." The video version of the film contains the filmmakers' apology.

At one level, the filmmakers should not have had difficulty admitting that their portrayal of the school or even of these two athletes' lives was not totally accurate. How could it be? As William Gates explained,

"At times it was embarrassing, especially when you had these three white guys and a lot of cameras following you around the [all black Cabrini-Green] neighborhood. But after a while, you start looking forward to having them around." [6]

Thus, as Robert Flaherty worried in 1921 when he shot *NANOOK OF THE NORTH*, one of the first full-length documentary films, the presence of the intruders from the alien culture as well as the existence of the cameras inevitably changes the subjects' responses and transforms everyday life into special and artificial situations. Seventy years later, in a wall-to-wall media age where the subjects have seen endless hours of film and television (Nanook had never even seen a photograph), cinema verité becomes impossible.

But more to the point for *HOOP DREAMS*, the choice of Gates and Agee was highly subjective and totally determined by the exigencies of the story line. The filmmakers selected eighth grade basketball players who clearly had "blue chip" potential — athletes who should excel in high school, could probably win athletic scholarships from major universities, and possibly reach that elite and miniscule circle who play in the NBA (National Basketball Association). The filmmakers chose Gates and Agee because their lives promised a predictable kind of sports drama — high stakes victory or defeat.

They did not select two young black men from the 'hood who possessed the same dreams as Gates and Agee and who worked as hard on their basketball skills but lacked "blue chip" talent. Such players might not even make their high school varsity and probably would fall short of college athletic scholarships, never mind shots at the pros. A film about two typical losers in the rat race, representing the vast majority of participants, would reveal a far different sports and political reality.

In *HOOP DREAMS*, the filmmakers present the following statistics: Every year in the United States, about 500,000 young men play high school basketball; about 14,000 of them will make it to college basketball; and about 25 from this pool will go on to the NBA. However, these statistics are misleading. In fact, the majority of basketball players at university level are white and middle-class and playing for such NCAA Division III schools as Kenyon. In any given year, the schools in big-time basketball (NCAA Division I) recruit about 1,300 male players; about 800 of them are African American but only about 500 are ghetto kids. (Increasing numbers of black stars, like Grant Hill, are from middle-class backgrounds.) Thus about .005% win athletic scholarships as Gates and Agee did. But the dreams of the approximately one hundred thousand black inner city teenagers who lose this race every year are as real as those of the "blue-chippers." And the power of the sports fantasy over these youngsters — who squander their school years pursuing this dream — reveals a political situation much more desperate and despicable than audiences saw in this film. [7]

The strength and power of *HOOP DREAMS* is not its sports story — that becomes too predictable and genre driven — but its representation of the players' families, particularly their mothers, Emma Gates and Sheila Agee. Their lives are much more typical than those of their talented sons. Thus the revelation of their struggles makes a more powerful statement than do the stories of their kids' basketball careers. These two African-American women, who never dunked a basketball, are

the true heroes of HOOP DREAMS, and the reality of their lives is what rivets many viewers. Their strength is what we should admire, and their moments of despair and joy provide the best instances of documentary authenticity in the film.

When Arthur Agee's father leaves home, a victim of crack addiction, Sheila has to keep the family together. At one point, she turns to the camera and says,

"Do you ever ask yourself how I get by on \$268 a month and keep this house and feed these children? Do you ever ask yourself that question?"

Most white upper or middle-class people never do ask such questions. Too many of them embraced Ronald Reagan's cartoon of "Welfare Queens" and now endorse Newt Gingrich's even more vicious slanders on welfare mothers. But entering the reality of Sheila Agee's life gives most viewers of this film unprecedented access to a world about which they know almost nothing, and this documentary authenticity transforms the Agee and Gates families into non-demonic and very human people.

At one point, Sheila has so little money that the utility companies turn off the electricity and heat in the Agee apartment. The filmmakers come upon the scene and show the family in the cold and dark. To the documentarists great credit — and this is not in the film — they then give Sheila the money to pay her utility bills.[8] (Only documentarists possessing the illusion of objectivity would not intervene for fear of changing the reality.) Sheila Agee struggles against her poverty and with amazing determination takes a school course to train as an auxiliary nurse. When she receives word that she has passed the course, she bursts into tears of joy — this is the film's best moment, one that far transcends the basketball triumphs of her son.

Unfortunately, in HOOP DREAMS, family life is secondary to basketball careers, but in the course of almost three hours we do learn some extraordinary and disturbing facts about big-time high school and college basketball and its political context. The suburban high school, St. Joseph's, plucks Arthur Agee and William Gates out of the ghetto. However, after their freshmen year, the coach decides that Arthur is not talented enough for the team and throws him back into inner city Chicago. There is a horrifying contrast between the sleek, white suburban school, with its polite students and earnest teachers, versus dilapidated, dangerous Marshall High, with its gangbangers and frazzled staff. These images imprint upon the viewer much more deeply than do the glossy Hollywood versions of suburban and 'hood high schools in coming-of-age fictions.

Meanwhile, William Gates, although an indifferent student, succeeds on the basketball court and by the end of his sophomore year seems truly destined for the NBA. Then his Hoop Dream cracks — in crazily intense practice drills before his junior year, he tears up a knee. After the doctors operate, they advise him to sit out the season. The effect on William is astounding: rather than perceive the fragility of the dream and seize the opportunity to gain a good education at a suburban high school, he loses interest in his studies. The subtext is clear: for kids like William, the dream of sports stardom is so powerful and so tied to their self-definition that when the dream is in mortal danger — the doctors warn William that he might not regain full use of his knee — the individual begins to disintegrate along with the dream.

Fortunately for William, because he has shown so much athletic potential before his injury, the school pays for the best physical rehabilitation available, and also arranges for the head of the Encyclopedia Britannica Corporation to sponsor him at the school and for special tutoring. Slowly he regains use of his knee. He begins to play again and to study to meet NCAA college eligibility requirements (a few years ago, the NCAA, as part of its "student-athlete" propaganda, ruled that incoming freshmen must attain minimum — and minimal — scores of 700 out of 1600 on their SAT or the equivalent on their ACT exams to compete as freshmen).

Next, in one of those wonderful ironies that real life and documentaries, unlike Hollywood fiction films, provide, Arthur Agee grows much taller, gets his basketball game together, and becomes a star in Chicago's top flight — athletically, not academically — public school league. Arthur has an excellent senior year and is on track for an athletic scholarship at a major university, but he cannot get near 700 on his SATs (only 25% of the questions answered correctly). After twelve years of schooling, Arthur's math and verbal skills are meager — even in high school, he has never taken Algebra. But he can go to a junior college without the SAT minimum score and he receives an athletic scholarship from Mineral Area J.C. in Missouri. There, he lives in a bleak cinderblock house with the other black basketball players on the team — the only African Americans in this white, sliced-bread corner of middle America.

Meanwhile William, although still troubled with his knee injury, performs well at the Nike summer basketball camp that the important college coaches attend in their search for talent — their slang term for the camp is "The Meat Market." He later receives an athletic scholarship offer from Marquette University. Even though he had once dreamed of a higher-octane program, he wisely accepts the Marquette deal. The movie ends with Arthur at the bleak Montana JUCO and William on his way to Milwaukee.[9] After the final action frame of *HOOP DREAMS*, the filmmakers add a written postscript: William had a troubled career at Marquette, dropped out for a while, but eventually returned; Arthur made it to Division I basketball on an athletic scholarship at Arkansas State University (Junior College transfers do not have to meet SAT minimums and whether Arthur could ever get a total of 700 on the SATs is unknown).

Most film critics focused on and cheered William and Arthur's rise from the ghetto. However, a few reviewers saw another message in the film. Joseph Cunneen in the *National Catholic Reporter* — prompted in part by the film's devastating portrait of a Catholic high school's chasing sports fame — commented,

"When the movie is over, however, even jocks are apt to ask themselves: What kind of a society is it that can't seem to provide black male children with alternative dreams, ones that can be pursued at better odds?"[10]

The major problem with *HOOP DREAMS* is that its images raise such questions but the filmmakers never explore them. Indeed, they relentlessly avoid analysis in favor of the "star" trajectories of William and Arthur. Occasionally in the movie, we hear the voice of one of the filmmakers prompt a subject by asking a question. But never do they ask the officials at St. Joseph's or comparable institutions why white suburban high schools — public as well as parochial — search for athletic talent in the ghetto and yet rarely seek bright young black kids with high academic potential

but minimal sports ability? And why do so many universities engage in similar search-and-ignore missions? (The answers would reveal part of the deep racism in the U.S. and the desire on the part of many whites to confine blacks to entertainer roles.)

The filmmakers also show young Arthur and William watching NBA games on TV, captivated by the media images of professional players like Michael Jordan, caught up in the marketing campaigns of Nike and other athletic shoe manufacturers. But they never analyze the meaning of such hegemonic slogans as "Work hard, play hard," and "It's up to you," and how these manipulate and mock the U.S. dream of class mobility when placed within the context of the astronomical odds of ghetto kids actually being "like Mike."

Finally, HOOP DREAMS becomes an advertisement for the lottery. Instead of revealing how the dream of winning the sports lottery is a cruel fantasy and socially regressive as well as repressive, the film tries to catch us up in the lives of two potential winners. Indeed, the post-production careers of Agee, Gates, and the filmmakers are the story of a bunch of guys who hit the Giant Lotto number.

At first, when the filmmakers tried to interest distributors in their finished product, according to Steve James,

"They saw that it was a documentary, was nearly three hours long and was about black basketball players, and figured 'Strike three — you're out.' Once we got to Sundance, all that conventional wisdom flew out the window." [11]

If HOOP DREAMS had resembled the film described by James — a true documentary, taking three hours to explore the political context as well the lives of black basketball players representative of the legion who do not win the sports lottery — then, in all probability, the audience and judges at the Sundance Film Festival would have disliked it. Such powerful critics as Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert would have ignored it instead of pushing it toward major distribution. And the film would become a documentary cult classic rather than a mainstream critical and commercial triumph. The story of HOOP DREAMS' post-production career is a revealing tale of Media-Made America today.

After the film won other awards and placed on many critics' "Ten Best Films of 1994" lists, it reaped a publicity bonanza when the Academy Award selectors, because of the archaic voting system in the Documentary category, failed to nominate it for the final round of the 1994 award. The resulting controversy pushed the box office receipts over \$5 million — unprecedented for a documentary film in the mall cinema age — and put the predicted video dollars at another \$3 million. Then the spinoffs began: Spike Lee signed with Turner Broadcasting to do a TV version of the film. A major publishing house commissioned a book on the film. PBS paid top dollar to telecast the film during the fall of 1995. And the filmmakers went on to other projects, one a movie entitled, NAGASAKI DUST, and the other a film based on a famous former pro basketball player, Connie Hawkins, who had a very troubled career. [12]

The initial success of HOOP DREAMS also started the commodification of William Gates and Arthur Agee. Michael Apted, the British movie director, predicted that the film's reception would "open doors for those two fellows," and such TV programs as ABC's NIGHTLINE soon validated their media status when it proclaimed them "celebrities." Then, with the imprimatur of *People* magazine — its headline on an article on Agee and Gates was, "FOR THE STARS OF THE MOVIE HOOP DREAMS, THE REAL WORLD HOLDS UNEXPECTED PROMISE" — the boys hit their first paydays.[13] Spike Lee hired them as consultants for his TNT movie and various agencies began to pursue them for media appearances, speeches, store openings, etc.

William Gates ended his basketball playing career at Marquette in the spring of 1995. His injured knee and an inability to crack the starting lineup kept him on the bench for all but a few minutes of most games. Gates wisely retired from competitive b-ball after the season to pursue the opportunities provided by the success of HOOP DREAMS, including an announcing job on WMAQ-AM, the Chicago station with the highest listener ratings.

Arthur Agee, although just an average player on a mediocre team near the bottom of Division I, wants to continue to pursue his Hoop Dream. In an ultra-cynical move, the minor league United States Basketball League made him their 1994 Number One draft choice. The USBL calculated correctly that Agee's fame from the film would attract media attention for their league. Such important media outlets as the *Washington Post* responded with feature articles on Agee's Number One draft status (the articles did not mention that the USBL lives mainly on NBA rejects — those players cut from NBA teams — not on its own draft choices).[14]

The main theme of the post-production articles on Gates and Agee is — to quote the *Washington Post* headline — "Agee Sees a Brighter Future." The articles eerily parallel the file features on lottery winners — "Out of Work Truck Driver with Eight Mouths to Feed Hits the Big One." They are full of congratulation for the ticket holder and, by implication, for the society that rescues such poor, down-trodden people. The articles do not mention the millions of black basketball and lottery players devoured by the dream, and the political implications of this grotesque reality.

Thus, for all of its brilliant documentary sequences, HOOP DREAMS remains a Hollywood genre film about sports, focusing on the biographies of the stars, trying to catch us up in their adventures and triumphs, implying that their lives are typical stories, and never analyzing the political context in which these individuals exist.

When we watch Hollywood fiction films about sports stars, we do not expect political analysis; however, because HOOP DREAMS provides such vivid images of the U.S. urban poor, we want much more than a sports biopic. That a film in mainstream release delivers any glimpses of the reality of life on welfare is a miracle of sorts. However, HOOP DREAMS made it to the mall screens because of its star story—the very element that finally limits it. In the end, the phenomenon of HOOP DREAMS tells us as much about 1990s U.S. political and media culture as it does about basketball or ghetto life.

NOTES

1. Very few film critics have written about sports films, and even fewer have said anything coherent. However, Thomas Schatz's work, particularly, *Hollywood Genre: Formulas, Filmmaking & the Studio System*, Philadelphia, 1981, and my colleague Barbara Flinger's article, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' Revisited: The Progressive Genre," reprinted in *The Genre Reader*, edited Barry K. Grant, Austin, 1984, as well as other essays in Grant's anthology, supplied an excellent matrix of ideas about genre and ideology to apply to sports films.
2. Louis Giannetti in *Understanding Movies*, 4th edition, New Jersey, 1988, provided an outstanding discussion on the history of documentary film and the on-going problems confronting documentarists. In the first four editions of his successful textbook, Giannetti included long sections on documentary films, culminating in the chapter on the subject in the fourth edition. His interest reflected the popularity of the form in the late 1960s and 1970s when he began work on his textbook. By the late 1980s, however, the public had so lost interest in documentaries that he dropped the chapter in his fifth and sixth editions and only refers to the form in a few scattered paragraphs in those books.
3. Ray Mark Rinaldi reviewed HOOP DREAMS for the *Albany (NY) Times Union* on Feb. 16, 1995.
4. The Nexis-Lexis database contains over twenty interviews with the filmmakers, individually as well as in twos and threes, during 1994 and 1995. In almost all of the interviews, the filmmakers claim to have captured the objective truth of the lives of William Gates and Arthur Agee. The lawsuit was entitled "St. Joseph High School, et al v. Kartemquin Educational Films and New Line Cinema Corporation." *The Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, Feb 15, 1995, reported on it and the out-of-court settlement.
5. William Gates made his comments about the filmmakers' initial approach on Charlie Rose's PBS program, May 3, 1995.
6. Gates told the *Washington Post* on May 7, 1995, about how the filmmakers followed him and Agee around.
7. For more statistics and a comprehensive critique of intercollegiate athletics, see my *College Sports Inc.: The Athletic Department vs. the University*, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1991.
8. Steve James told the story about the utility bills to the *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 1, 1995.
9. Although the actual term "Meat Market" is not in the film — similar ones are — it is the one used most often by coaches. See *College Sports Inc.*, pages 232-33.
10. Joseph Cunneen, *National Catholic Reporter*, Mar. 10, 1995.
11. Steve James made his comments about the importance of the Sundance Festival to HOOP DREAMS to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 15, 1995,
12. The Nexis-Lexis database contains over five hundred articles on the post-production fate, including the box office receipts, of HOOP DREAMS. There are

more articles on the Academy Award flap than on any other aspect of the film.

13. Michael Apter made his comment on the above-mentioned NIGHTLINE program, and host Cokie Roberts validated the players celebrity status at the show's beginning. The *People* magazine article and headline appeared, April 3, 1995.

14. The *Washington Post* article on Agee was on May 7, 1995. Agee was released by the USBL team but continued to pursue his playing dream.

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Hoop Dreams Hoop realities

by Lee Jones

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The best, most poignant representation of inner city African America is the brilliant documentary HOOP DREAMS co-directed and co-produced by Steve James, Frederick Marx, and Peter Gilbert. Seen through the prism of basketball, this documentary says much about race and differential opportunity in the United States and the role that sports, as the only viable option to a better life, plays in shaping the lives of two typical inner city young black males. This film, like no other recent production, shows how basketball becomes a sense of obligation rather than a game. In many instances, the athletic success or failure of these inner city black kids literally becomes a matter of life and death.

Despite its wide reception as a mainstream documentary, the film really provides an ethnographic portrait of inner city African American life as it relates to the game of basketball. The cinematography in HOOP DREAMS is devoid of much color and brilliance, consistent with the lives of the Agee and Gates families. Their life in the ghetto and their struggle to maintain it in an indifferent society do not warrant a glossy display. What HOOP DREAMS exposes is big-time professional sports' lure and promise and exploitation of young, inner-city black males. The film also decenters long held stereotypes about the residents who happen to live in the ghetto.^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) The film contains a larger story beyond basketball glory.

Within it lie simple stories about the strength of the often fragmented families, the importance of the extended family in the African American community, the love shared at family celebrations and gatherings, the tremendous resilience in the face of too frequent setbacks, and the role that black women play in maintaining the family unit under conditions of near Third World poverty. These themes take us on a journey to the other United States, capturing real human stories that remain ignored within popular debates about inner city pathology.

HOOP DREAMS follows the fortunes of Arthur Agee and William Gates, who both live in poor black neighborhoods in Chicago. Beginning at age fourteen, both youngsters are followed via betacam for four and one-half years, through their high school years attempting to reach their "hoop dreams." What makes these two young characters so special is their unique ability to play the game they love —

basketball. They have such uncanny skill that it earns them attention in sections of Chicago a social world away from them.

The film begins with a panoramic view of downtown Chicago from the angle of the projects. We see a quick glance of the surroundings that make up Arthur's and William's isolated world. The city's subway/elevated train system, affectionately known as the El, runs through their neighborhood overlooking the notorious high rise housing projects and shuffling passengers to other destinations. The neighborhood is complete with small kids playing on the street and other kids shooting basketball on fairly clean courts amid poor housing and unkempt surroundings.

We first meet William and Arthur at their respective homes sitting with their families watching the NBA All-Star game hosted by the city of Chicago. A 14 year-old William, watching with his mother, reacts joyously as his favorite players execute dynamic plays. He tells us, "Right now, I want to play in the NBA. That's all I think about." After he finishes watching the game, he goes outside to mimic the players' moves. There's no cheer from the crowd, no nets on the rims, but plenty of rust on the backboards as the film captures William in slow motion going up for a graceful slam dunk which seems quite an achievement for a 14 year-old kid.

Next we are introduced to Arthur, also 14, studying the players' graceful moves on TV with equal intensity. He says, "The first thing that I am going to do when I get to the NBA is to go see my mama and buy her a house." He has no doubt in his mind that basketball represents his future profession and his family's ticket out of the projects. Alluding to pro-athletics' glamour and media saturation, his mother, Sheila Agee, says that Arthur tells his little brother he is on NIKE's tennis show television commercials.

The film follows William, Arthur and their families on the boys' slippery journey through high school as they meet an assortment of coaches, teachers, talent scouts and pro sports celebrities who all influence what both youngsters see as a viable goal: to reach NBA's echelons. This vision of stardom has been dangled in front of the boys not only by coaches but by family as well. William's brother and Arthur's father each try to live their fantasy of reaching the NBA through their up-and-coming hoop heroes.

After both William and Arthur are accepted at the private St. Joseph's Catholic school, they make a three-hour round trip train ride every day to the suburb of Westchester to get to school. The film very poignantly shows what William and Arthur must go through on one particular winter morning walking through the snow to get to the doors of St. Joseph's. Their difficult trek shows just how hard that they must work to have a chance at their basketball dream. Once inside, Arthur recounts how different the school is from other schools he's attended, ones clearly not on par with white suburban academies like St. Joseph's. Almost immediately he becomes stricken with self-doubt: "I've never been around a lot of white people before."

Reflecting the poor education available to people like William and Arthur, both tested at a fourth or fifth grade level. A guidance counselor even told William, "You have to be one good ballplayer to get in this school with those grades." With time and encouragement, William's grades begin to improve, as does his basketball

success. This begins to ease his doubts that he can't compete with other St. Joseph students. But Arthur clearly hates school. To him it's a bother, just another hurdle he has to leap on his way to the NBA.

The film stresses the differential treatment that talented young African American athletes get versus the treatment that ghetto youth do. Both William and Arthur are promised partial tuition scholarships, while a scholarship fund at the Cabrini Green housing corporation will pay the remainder of the costs. When they are in their sophomore year, the school raises tuition. Both William and Arthur must come up with additional funding to cover the increase. Arthur was the starting point guard on the freshman squad, but his skills did not develop as fast as head basketball coach, Gene Pingatore, would have liked. On the other hand, William's performance proved so good that, as a freshman, he was a starter on the varsity team, one of Illinois' top ranked teams.

William proved to be a valuable commodity, but not Arthur. Coach Pingatore himself found funding for William. Patricia Weir, president of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, not only paid the remainder of William's tuition but provided him with an excellent summer job. In contrast, Arthur, who did not get any funding, was "locked out" of St. Joseph's in the middle of a semester. To show this, the filmmakers employed a powerful visual metaphor: a row of lockers with padlocks securely fastened. Also, Arthur's summer job was at Pizza Hut, working with his friend Shannon for \$3.25 per hour. Both Arthur and his mother know why the school didn't find him additional funding — Coach Pingatore did not consider him star material. This decision angered Arthur's parents and delivered a huge blow to Arthur's self-esteem.

Later, when William and Arthur were choosing college, obviously Arthur had not been able to take all the required courses and could not do well enough on the ACT to go to a Division 1 school. He had to settle for a junior college in southern Missouri. William went to a better college. His benefactor Patricia Weir got him a tuition-free ACT prep course, which helped him get the required 18 on his ACT and a scholarship to Marquette University.

This differential treatment makes so many African American inner city ghetto kids want to be sports stars. Doors of opportunity become opened to them that would otherwise remain closed in such a racist and classist society. They get access to things that others in their neighborhood don't. Many poor black kids would love to have William's opportunities, but without basketball stardom potential, they won't. For youth coming from families with very limited resources, a college education is usually unaffordable without a scholarship. Clearly the quickest way to get noticed by the top schools is through athletics. College athletic departments send out recruiters and scouts to scour the inner city, specifically looking for the best athletes.

Many schools have much of their African American student population in the athletic department. For instance, at a certain major university in the Pacific Northwest, 40% of the black males on campus are on the football team alone. When student enrollment figures include other black students on the basketball team and track squad, it becomes clear that more than 50% of the black males on campus are athletes on scholarship. This figure parallels that of many other universities.

Many African Americans could only dream of going to such places like Georgetown, Stanford, Michigan, Miami and other schools without the aid of an athletic scholarship. Colleges and universities do not usually scour the inner city to look for future scientists, doctors, teachers, or the academically gifted. Athletically talented, inner-city black male teenagers are a commodity. Kids like Arthur and William become reduced to mere "black bucks" by white and black coaches, who measure the boys' value only by how well they can shoot a basketball, run the courts, or play defense. Since only athletic scholarships are offered in abundance to inner city kids by major universities, cultivating athletic prowess becomes the means to an end for many who have no other hopes of going to college.

In *The Last Shot: City Streets, Basketball Dreams*, Darcy Frey depicts a rising young New York City basketball player, Corey Johnson, who has interests other than basketball.[2] He is a gifted poet and talented in other areas, but his grades don't reflect that. Frey generalizes:

"Black inner city kids are always accused of doing nothing but throwing a ball through a hoop. At least that's what a lot of white suburbanites assume they're doing. Then along comes someone like Corey, who takes pleasure in a million other things. In Coney Island, however, you deviate from the one and only path to college at extreme personal risk — scholarships for athletes being significantly easier to come by than those for underachievers or ghetto poets."(196-97)

Recruited as athletes first and students second, some do take advantage of this opportunity to earn a degree. Some go on to a professional sports career. Although not ideal, often the only way a poor youngster will attend a university, given the paltry education s/he receives and cutbacks in educational loans and grants, is through a college athletic scholarship. William and Arthur know this.

After the tuition dilemma, Arthur and William begin their distinct but equally stony paths toward the hoped — for goal of NBA glory. William, courtesy of his "benefactor," remains at St. Joseph's. Arthur develops his skills at Marshall, a public high school. As the film progresses, we see that basketball remains an obsession for Arthur, but for William it becomes a job. Later William says he doesn't find basketball fun anymore. He goes on to criticize the system of amateur athletics that steals the joy of basketball from him.

Why did William and Arthur pin so much hope on making it to the NBA in the first place? Why would they consider that option more attainable than becoming a doctor, lawyer, or computer programmer? A limited number of opportunities — real and perceived — are available to the poor. William and Arthur form part of the so-called "underclass," a term first coined by Charles Murray in 1984 in *Losing Ground* and then made popular within social science circles by University of Chicago sociologist William J. Wilson. The people designated by this term have limited job prospects and opportunities for legitimate social advancement. In the past, poor inner city ethnics had viable and legitimate opportunities, ones which have disappeared, due largely to the mobility of capital and what is known as "deindustrialization."

In 1987 in his important and controversial *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner*

City, The Underclass and Public Policy, William J. Wilson attempted to explain the inner city's social structure. He bases his argument on research conducted in Chicago in the early to mid-1980s, the time that William Gates and Arthur Agee lived as teenagers in Chicago's poor neighborhoods. Wilson describes the rapid, post-World War II transformation of the U.S. economy to service industries. This process is widely known as deindustrialization, a term first coined by economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison.[3] Inner city residents, particularly but not exclusively blacks, have suffered disproportionately from this shift.

Wilson details the results of this shift. First, high wage, low skilled, manufacturing jobs traditionally available to those with limited education (high school diploma, GED, or slightly less) are no longer being created. These jobs have either moved overseas or to the suburbs, or eliminated altogether. Second, jobs created to replace the former are low-wage service sector jobs, which require as much if not more education than manufacturing jobs did. These jobs, although relatively plentiful, are so low-paying that workers usually remain at or near poverty wages. Third, inner city residents have had to face a general increase in unemployment. Rapid deindustrialization and the flight of capital cause a huge lack of jobs, which cannot be filled by the service sector.

The film gives a specific example of deindustrialization. Arthur Agee's father Bo previously held a good manufacturing job but was laid off. He stumbled through a number of jobs but none were permanent nor paid the wages that the factory job did. Finally, he fell into the trap of drugs in effort to salve his wounded self, damaged by what he perceived as his failure to provide for his family.

Wilson focuses on class, rather than race, as the key to understanding the plight of African Americans trapped in poverty. His analysis contrasts sharply with conservative rhetoric, which questions poor people's motivation or individual responsibility, and also contrasts with liberal rhetoric, which mostly blames racism. *HOOP DREAMS* shows the human struggles of two families who desperately want to get out of poverty but find limited avenues to do so. They, too, believe in hard work and self help. Witness Sheila Agee's graduation from nurses' training and her determination to get the education needed to raise her family out of the ghetto.

One of the most poignant and heartbreaking characters in *HOOP DREAMS*, a prime example of a postindustrial economic casualty, is Curtis Gates, William's older brother. Curtis was a star prospect just like his younger brother William. He grabbed the headlines with his stellar play and was heavily recruited by a number of colleges. But he could not get into a Division I school because the institutions that wanted him feared he could not maintain a basic level of academic performance to remain eligible. Curtis opted for Colby Junior College in Kansas. The first thing he says in the film is,

"All my basketball dreams are gone. All my dreams are in [William] now. I want him to make it [to the NBA] so bad that I don't know what to do."

Curtis works at a number of dead-end low paying jobs, like those William J. Wilson discusses, and eventually winds up losing his job as a security guard. In a very candid interview, he says he feels like a failure. With no marketable skills, he lapses

into unemployment for four months.[4] Dejected, he has lost all his self-esteem and confidence. Although he realizes that he has been used by the system, he refuses to blame that system, only himself. His story is not unique. For every ball player lucky enough to make it through the system and escape poverty through professional ball, like Isiah Thomas, there are a million Curtises. Failed by a system that discriminates and exploits, in a very tight economy he struggles to find another way out. Curtis' mother says she wished he would have at least finished college and got an education even if he didn't wind up a basketball star.

Curtis' story points to another reason why kids like Arthur and William try so hard to make it to the pros. Clearly seen in the film is how much of their family and friends' hopes are riding on their success. The boys do not just play for their own personal fortunes but for their family and friends' redemption as well. Having to play basketball not only for oneself but for one's family's future must impose an enormous amount of pressure on the young players. Not only do they face the pressure to perform well enough to play professional sports, but also not to become one of the many failures that form a constant element of an inner-city black kid's landscape. In the film we learn that Arthur's father Bo Agee was also a local hoop star with dreams of making it to the pros. Now he wants to "make it" through his son.

As failures of other young basketball stars mount, so too does the pressure felt by those who continue to try to be among the minuscule number that make it to the NBA. NBA star Charles Barkley writes in the introduction to the HOOP DREAMS companion book:

“For every David Robinson, Shaquille O'Neal, Hakeem Olajuwon and Patrick Ewing, there are countless names who will never make it. It's not bad that these kids tried, there's nothing wrong with chasing your dream. But it's sad when anyone allows themselves to be deluded by glitter and gold. There are so many guys I know who had intelligence to do almost anything, but all they thought about was basketball. And when basketball didn't work out, they had nothing to turn to.” (9)

When they do not reach the pros, which the odds portend,[5] many return to the ghetto, once again to be counted among the so-called underclass. One can only imagine the pressure carried by a teenager who is seen as "the hope of the neighborhood," as people have labeled New York City basketball star Stephon Marbury (now a freshman guard at Georgia Tech University). It is rare that a teen has had Marbury's success. He has graced nearly every major newspaper in New York, is profiled at length in a popular magazine (VIBE), is profiled on television including on the international cable sports station ESPN, and is mentioned in nearly every major basketball trade magazine in the Western hemisphere. Young black athletic hopefuls feel an immense pressure to be like him, be "the big star," and so redeem the hopes of the many who were equally celebrated but failed.

Although Arthur does not mention the pressure, William does: "I always felt that Curtis shouldn't be living his dream through me." In a visually symbolic scene the filmmakers show William's returning to his grammar school gym, where he shoots baskets on the court by himself. We see him take several shots alone. The panoramic shots of the huge gym makes it look like the gym has swallowed him.

The pressure that William feels playing ball seems to have made him lonely. He stated earlier in the film, "It seems like everybody is my coach," alluding to the fact that people see him as a ballplayer rather than a person. He represents his family's meal ticket. He longs to be carefree again and enjoy the sport rather than the business of basketball. During this scene he speaks of his sophomore year in high school when he was carefree and just wanted to play ball for fun rather than for a purpose.

Poverty and the desire to escape its deleterious effects are prime motivators. In one scene in the film, the Agee family has their utilities cut off. Sheila Agee is seen carrying a single lamp with no shade through a dark apartment, lighting her way so that she knows where she is walking. An extension cord comes from a neighbor willing to supply power to help them out. Arthur stays close to his mother and walks around looking bewildered. NBA riches, with an average salary of \$989,000, [6] would guarantee that the family never had to repeat such humiliation. Another time, after being held up at gunpoint in his neighborhood a week before leaving for college, Arthur confesses with a look of fear and despair, "I'm ready to leave this place, Everybody is either on the streets, doin' drugs, goin' to jail, or dead." It's obvious to Arthur that the only thing he has right now is a basketball and a dream.

Sports no longer is a game. It's now a desperate means to an end. It is seen as the only opportunity to get out of the ghetto. Darcy Frey writes about the conversation he overheard between two coaches at a famous basketball camp while sizing up a white, suburban high school basketball player's skill. Frey writes:

"They conclude that he was "not hungry enough" to compete in college against black players from the ghetto."(68)

The connotation here is that black ghetto youth appear "hungrier." That's because they have made basketball into more than a game. It truly confronts many of them as their "last shot."

African American youth from more affluent areas or living in families not so desperately poor tend to place less emphasis on athletics as a ticket to a better life. They may dream about a professional sports career. A number of players in the NBA have come from largely middle class backgrounds. But they tend to place more or as much energy in their studies. This may occur for various reasons, perhaps access to better schools, an educated parent or close relative, or the knowledge that they don't have to play sports to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Take, for example, Tshaka Shipp, an African American, New York City high school basketball star chronicled in Darcy Frey's book. Shipp and his family live in a stable working-class neighborhood in Jamaica, Queens. His sister has a degree in social work and his widowed mother has a job as a secretary at a local college. Shipp often voices his concern for his safety when he ventures into the Coney Island projects to play ball with his friends, who live there trapped in highrise projects. Shipp doesn't have to depend on basketball as his ticket out of the ghetto. He often proclaims that he is "[using] basketball to further my education."

However, since the post-industrial shift in the U.S. economy, many of those with higher education have not gotten the same return on their educational investment

as college graduates previously enjoyed. In fact, for African American males with an education equal to whites, the income disparity between the two groups has actually widened since 1970.[7] Hence, education does not necessarily mean economic success. This may be why many middle-class black kids now also view pro athletics as a viable option. But with a difference — these middle class kids, like Grant Hill, tend to place an equal emphasis on education.

Unskilled labor now spells almost certain longterm unemployment or low wages. Compounding this problem is the poor education that often characterizes the inner city. Poor schools cheat inner city youth of acquiring the basic skills they need to go on to college and compete. Our economy is expanding in terms of profits but shrinking in labor force size while driving wages down. To African American males, the notion of getting a job at a livable wage or of going to college often seems a distant dream. What is more tangible, and a clear alternative to illegal activities, is often sports and entertainment. That's why black youth may spend many more hours on the court or on the field rather than in the library studying.

Athletes in the United States are worshipped and held up as role models, heroes and sometimes spokespeople for social causes. In Black America, young people's worship of athletes is even more pronounced. Many young African Americans hold Michael Jordan, Ken Griffey, Jr., and Deion Sanders in more reverence than perhaps their own parents. In HOOP DREAMS, when we see William and Arthur an NBA All-Star game, whenever their hero, Isiah Thomas, makes a play, they along with their families react with bursts of joy and laughter. Throughout William's career at St. Joseph's, the image of Isiah Thomas is constantly dangled in front of him by his coach and other parties. Arthur even goes as far as to adopt Thomas' nickname, Tuss, and write it on the back of his basketball shoes.

Why is it that William and Arthur and many inner city blacks like them hold such reverence for athletes and athletics? In the past, African Americans held professionals such as preachers, teachers, doctors, and others in esteem, above that of the athlete. A number of factors have contributed to this twist. First, after the 1960s Civil Rights struggle, many blacks perceived that roughly 15-year stretch of activism as more a less a failure since it did not end the problem of racism and inequality. As a result many African Americans were solidified in their belief that racism and inequality are a permanent condition, and they were also left with an acute distrust of black leaders. Included in the indictment of black leadership were black ministers, since the Civil Rights struggle was waged largely under the leadership of black ministers, most notably Dr. Martin Luther King.

When after the Civil Rights struggle was for all intents over, a number of blacks were left feeling that the goal of integration and legislation — a key theme of the Civil Rights leadership — was unwise. (The cry for Black Power, with its call for black self-determination and self-segregation has been quite popular among those who did not reap the benefits from the Civil Rights struggle.) Institutions that played a role in the Civil Rights struggle of the 1950s, 60s and 70s are now often marginalized in the black community, including the black church, which is frequently ignored by the post-Civil Rights generation.

Second, since the 1960s the black middle class has moved in great numbers to more affluent neighborhoods. The people left behind in the inner city have felt a sense of abandonment and labeled those who left as "sell outs." From the

perspective of the ghetto, middle class blacks in suburbs are often seen as tools of the white establishment, used to legitimate the system of oppression against African Americans by giving the appearance of a fair and meritorious society. The image of the black middle class has been dangled over the black poor by both conservatives and liberals, who use the success of the black middle class to blame poor blacks for their situation. This has led many ghetto residents to ridicule the black middle class. Thus, many youngsters who aspire to that move into the middle class by striving for academic excellence are labeled as "acting white" by other blacks. The only acceptable forms of advancement seemingly come through sports, entertainment, and illegal activities.

The move by the black middle class to the suburbs is also important because not only did these people take knowledge and economic resources with them, they also no longer could serve as role models for the youngsters still trapped in poverty. No longer were the doctors, lawyers, educators, and other professionals living in the same neighborhood with the poor. What has been left in the inner city to function as role models are those who are in the working class and the so-called underclass, complete with those who engage in illegal activities. It is difficult to find adequate models of success in the ghetto.

Third, this shift from reverence of community leaders to entertainment and sports stars came about because of media saturation of athletes. Role models now come from the athletes and entertainers paraded daily on TV. And black-owned media companies do little to counter this trend. As far back as the days of slavery, African Americans who were talented held a special place with the slave master. The slave who could sing, dance, play instruments, or tell jokes was a much-valued commodity on the plantation. This is still true today as poor inner city black kids see who gets the glory and fame in this society. It's the ballplayer and the entertainer, not the doctor, scientist, or teacher. As a result, what has developed is a glossy myth of deliverance through sports — in the case of HOOP DREAMS, specifically basketball.

A number of other reasons explain why African Americans are so infatuated with the game of basketball. Undoubtedly much of the infatuation comes in large part from U.S. society's preoccupation with sports. With the possible exception of ancient Greece, at no other time in history have athletes been rewarded and held in higher esteem than intellectuals and educators. Only in late capitalist culture would we see Michael Jordan's return to the game of basketball take frontpage precedent over any other national news. Only in a society such as ours would a state or city pay a sports association — Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Hockey League, and the National Football League — millions of taxpayer dollars to locate a team there or build a new stadium, while cuts in social welfare and education are routinely performed and applauded. Indeed, African Americans' love affair with the game of basketball is in part a symptom of the larger disease that permeates the United States.

In contrast, our neighbor Canada holds a very different perspective on sports. Sports is not worshipped in that culture like it is here. As a result, young athletes there view sports as a form of recreation rather than as a prospect for a future profession. This may be because there are few professional teams in Canada. For many poor Canadian youngsters of color, the game of basketball does not take on

as much importance as it does here. Halifax West High School basketball coach Mark Parker compares Canadian and U.S. attitudes toward basketball in this way:

"People don't understand, basketball in Canada is still a game. In the States, it can be a test of you being a man. It can be a test of you trying to be somebody. You don't understand that till you go down there and actually see it. In schools in the States it's basketball or nothing. Up here, it's not that. The thing is education. In the long run, I think it's good for the kids, because you want to get them to get something out of it, as opposed to just playing basketball. They've got to understand that they're only so many teams, only so many players." [8]

Although it's true that we glorify athletes within our culture, when social theorists attempt to chronicle basketball's appeal to inner city youngsters, they often overlook the factor of low equipment costs. With basketball, compared to baseball, football, hockey, etc., all one needs is a ball and court and no other equipment or players. In other sports one needs a ball, a sizable grassy area — a rarity in many "asphalt jungles" — and other players. Even in the poorest neighborhood, often the only sturdy structure in the whole community is the basketball goal. The area in which Arthur and William live testifies to this. Despite the dilapidated housing, the broken windows and the hollowed out buildings, there in the midst of despair sits a basketball court. And in the poorest neighborhood, often the only place that offers the kids a chance to escape, at least mentally, remains the basketball courts.

At one point in *HOOP DREAMS*, William, his girlfriend and their daughter are sitting at a table discussing why William had to play basketball rather than be with the mother when their daughter was born. William explains, "Basketball is my ticket out of the ghetto. It's the only way that I am ever going to go to college." His girlfriend replies, "Well, I'm going to college, and I don't play basketball."

This moment in the film, not expanded on, speaks to the different ways that black males and females value sports. William sees sports as a viable profession that will allow him to support his family and move them out of the ghetto. In contrast, his lover sees a college education as the path to that goal. Education has traditionally allowed black women into white collar jobs. Indeed, research shows that the return on education for African American women is second only to that for white men. And if black females had the same characteristics as white males, they would get the highest return on money paid for education than anyone in this society. [9] Furthermore, men have more opportunities than women to enter pro sports. Male athletes tend to participate in revenue-earning sports while female athletes remain largely confined to non-revenue-producing events. Several different leagues pay male athletes to play, but very few league options exist for women outside of tennis and golf. Therefore, black women view education more seriously than their male counterparts. This may be one reason why more African American women go to college or enter the professions than do African American males.

Several other stories embedded in *HOOP DREAMS* speak to the exploitation of athletes, particularly black athletes. The film shows William going to the famed NIKE basketball camp held each year in Indianapolis, an event known in some circles as the "meat market" or the "slave auction." Here the 120 best players, most of them from the inner city, attend what is officially known as the ABCD (Academic Betterment and Career Development) Camp. According to NIKE, it serves

primarily as an academic camp and secondarily as a basketball camp. This is hard to believe.

Only 120 male high-school basketball players receive invitations, and they are lavished with free tennis shoes, sports wear, meals, and accommodations and the chance to play in front of the best Division 1 college coaches. They get the opportunity to show the coaches their skills in person. As if at a slave auction, the coaches sit in the stands and take notes on which "thoroughbreds" they want to bring to their college. And this camp intensifies the mirage of stardom. The film shows such personalities as ESPN commentator Dick Vitale and filmmaker Spike Lee speaking to an overwhelmingly black audience. Also in the film, we briefly see such future college and NBA stars such as Juwon Howard and Jalen Rose. The documentary clearly shows us how basketball is more than a game. It is a business, which William later discovers.

This circus-like atmosphere pushes William to ponder his future in basketball. At the end of the film he says he's not so enthusiastic about trying to reach the NBA and feels he'd be equally happy if he didn't have basketball in his life. But Arthur, who didn't endure the same regimen as William, still clings to his dream of NBA stardom. He clings so tightly that he accepts a scholarship offer to a small junior college with only seven black people in the entire school (six are his teammates) with the hope that he can then later transfer after two years to a Division 1 college. We find out later that this does not quite happen.

Beyond the glare of the basketball lights lies a human story in HOOP DREAMS. It tells of struggle, triumph, defeat and courage in the face of adversities that threaten to lock the youths and their families in a world of despair. Indeed, perhaps no other film has shown the incredible strength of black families, especially of black women. Both mothers displayed incredible resiliency in the face of so many setbacks. At no point do we see the so-called "ghetto welfare queen" or "drug crazed, irresponsible mother." What we witness are the key roles that African American women have always played in black families' survival.

HOOP DREAMS says much about Black American life in particular, and U.S. society in general. Demonstrating the impact of class, race, differential opportunities, and gender are just as essential to this film as the game of basketball itself. The documentary allows the viewer to learn more about the human sacrifices made by those who run up and down our courts and fields trying to live their dreams amid a nightmare.

NOTES

1. See directors' comments on Fine Line Home Page, HOOP DREAMS, World Wide Web, <http://www.2interpath.net/fine/line/hdsynop.htm>
2. Darcy Frey, *The Last Shot* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994)
3. Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1982)
4. According to the companion book, *HOOP DREAMS* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995), Curtis is unemployed for more than six months.

5. I estimated the odds to be .00128%. The odds are much higher in other professions.
6. Bureau of the Census, Selected Spectator Sports, *The Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1993*, Table 410.
7. See Martin Carnoy's *Faded Dream: The Politics and Economics of Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
8. Paul Rubenstein, HOOP DREAMS in Halifax, World Wide Web, <http://www.ukings.ns.ca/docs/whatsnew/hoop.html>
9. See Patricia A. Gwartney-Gibbs and Patricia A. Taylor, "Black Women Workers' Earnings Progress in Three Industrial Sectors," *Sage: A Scholarly Journal of Black Women* 3:1 (Spring 1986), pp. 20-25.

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The Lion King A short history of Disney-fascism

by Matt Roth

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In this age of controversy over "children's entertainment," Disney Studios has maintained its status as purveyor of wholesome fun for the entire family — an amazing feat, considering the parade of death and gore that constitutes the average Disney feature. Disney's recent cash cow, *THE LION KING*, is no exception, imperiling its characters with all manner of blood-spattered mayhem and terrorizing impressionable youngsters with an emphatic display of the vaunted Disney "dark side" — that obsessive plumbing of horrors more real to children than death: parental loss, withdrawal of love, exile from family and friends, and blame for unintended acts of destruction.

But the emotional trauma that Disney tries its damndest to induce in young children is only the spadework for the ugly principles it feels it must implant in each new generation. Although the film takes place in an imaginary jungle, *THE LION KING* really expounds the Law of the Schoolyard: only the strong and the beautiful triumph, and the powerless survive only by serving the strong. As Disney sees it, children must not only acknowledge the supremacy of those born privileged and violent, the children must *love them*. The young must gaze in hushed veneration at the princely predators who stand ready to harvest the labor and flesh of their subjects. They must learn to giggle at the hopeless scampering of weak and stubby creatures as they dodge the jaws of their overlords. They must accept that true friendship means flattering those who would otherwise feast on their entrails.

Unfortunately, Disney also presents a vision of adult society. The full contours of this vision are difficult to see. We have to look past the sheer brilliance of Disney animation — with its dramatic thunderstorms and kaleidoscopic musical numbers. More so than the last few Disney features, which specialized in fluid shifts of reality, *THE LION KING* impresses us with its naturalism: the sun rising over the African savanna, gazelles bounding through the morning mists, herds of stampeding wildebeest. We are amazed by the range of expression their lions' faces can achieve, and the fact that the animators can make a hyena look like Whoopi Goldberg.

To appreciate Disney's coherent social vision, we also have to get past *THE LION KING*'s bizarre, rather incoherent story. We see a host of antelope and zebra

reverently bow down before a Lion King who makes no bones about wanting to eat them. The King and his Queen seem a monogamous pair; however, no other breeding male is visible in the pride of many lionesses. Hyenas inhabit a dark, nether region; when their population spreads out, their wasteland, for no apparent reason, spreads with them. By the time we encounter a wise-cracking warthog-meerkat pair, whose vaudeville shtick revolves obsessively around fart jokes, we begin to wonder: what are the writers *thinking*?

To truly understand the vision THE LION KING requires delving back into the Disney tradition — past the countless scenes of ugly, perverse villains vanquished by strong and beautiful heroes; of boys initiated into manhood through shows of martial valor; of girls seeking fulfillment in the arms of conquering males; of parents menaced or killed outright, too weak to prevent their children from undergoing their respective rites of passage; and of lovable weaklings who never themselves attain the personhood into which they bumblingly usher the main characters — until we reach 1938, when Walt Disney's beliefs converged with an ideology that has since fallen into nominal disrepute.

The tradition that leads to THE LION KING begins with PINOCCHIO — arguably the most beautifully animated of the Disney classics, undoubtedly the creepiest. In this, Disney's second animated feature, the blurry outlines of the Disney tradition suddenly become coherent — as the evocation of an ideology which still dared speak its name in the late 1930s, its power and prestige goose-stepping proudly across the world stage to the dazzlement of at least one animator-tycoon.

In 1938, the year PINOCCHIO was in production, Uncle Walt regularly attended meetings of the American Nazi Party in Hollywood, where *Mein Kampf* sold like hotcakes at corner newsstands. It comes as no surprise that Nazism resonated with Disney: he shared its conceit of white supremacy, its antagonism towards independent organized labor, its abhorrence of urbanism, and, above all, its hatred of Jews. He regarded himself as a bastion of Protestant morality in an industry dominated by Jew-spawned frivolity and lewdness. This sense of mission was buttressed by more prosaic market concerns: Hitler, who also made the link between Hollywood and Jews, barred U.S. films from Germany, an act which gravely distressed Disney. History is thus unclear on whether in making PINOCCHIO, Disney was paying homage to the Nazis or simply pandering to them. (Fortunately, Hitler returned Disney's affection: his favorite song was "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf"; in 1937 Goebbels presented a birthday gift of 18 Mickey Mouse shorts to the Führer.)

PINOCCHIO begins among the honest peasants of a pristine Alpine village. Pinocchio, created by the gentle watchsmith Geppetto and "given life" by a Hollywood starlet descending from her celestial orb, sets out on the path of good: to school, where he can presumably learn about his national culture. Unfortunately, his puppet nature, lacking a will of its own, allows him to be rather easily led astray, his Jiminy-Cricket conscience notwithstanding. The villains who divert him from the straight-and-narrow, appearing in order of escalating evil, are straight out of a fascist primer; their real-life analogs would all, under the Nazis, wear distinguishing patches on their clothes before being shipped to the concentration camps.

The first villain, The Fox, is mannered, effeminate, urbane and of the theater. His

small, strangely elastic companion, The Cat, constantly slithers around him and through his legs. Clumsily, the two of them often become entwined with each other in a chaos of limbs. They are clearly gay. The Fox entices Pinocchio to the "theater," selling him to the evil Gypsy Stromboli, the most blatant ethnic stereotype in the movie. Stromboli, cashing in on his new stringless puppet, is greedy, dishonest, violent and inhumanly cruel — clearly of an inferior race. His presence also underscores PINOCCHIO's distinctly Old World landscape, where Gypsies ranked higher on the list of despised minorities than they did in America. Stromboli locks a frightened and weeping Pinocchio in a cage; the puppet escapes only with the help of the starlet. Unfortunately, it's out of the frying pan and into the fire for our poor hero.

The Fox traps him again, this time to sell him to the worst of the villains: a stout, cruel-visaged businessman, dealing from a shadowy corner of a restaurant on a dark and foggy city street — so greedy and evil that he scares even The Fox and The Cat. He is, in short, everything that a Nazi would expect of a Jew.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler explains the nefarious scheme of the Jews: they lure good, solid German men — artisans like Geppetto — into the city, to be corrupted by vice and Communism. Once degraded by these alien influences, the German worker is permanently enslaved. Accordingly, the Jew in PINOCCHIO lures little (gentile) boys to Pleasure Island, an amusement park where they can misbehave. The atmosphere is dark and crowded, dense and full of movement — in short, city-like. The urban vice is there: Pinocchio and a pugfaced boy hang out in a pool hall. The Communism is there: the main attraction is a mansion that the boys are allowed to demolish in an orgiastic attack on private property. The degradation follows: the boys, having made asses out themselves figuratively, become literal donkeys. Finally, their ultimate enslavement: the donkeys are put to hard labor in the mines. Pinocchio, at first on the road to a wholesome Aryanism, is ultimately at risk of falling into the debased proletariat. And all because of homosexuals, Gypsies, and Jews.

Pinocchio luckily comes to his senses and manages to escape with only a tail and floppy ears. Returning home, he finds that Geppetto has gone in search of him — the starlet informs him that the watchmaker is in the belly of a monstrous whale.

What follows is a sequence that appears repeatedly in Disney movies: a trial of masculine initiation in which the initiate exerts his *will* to overcome a seemingly overwhelming force, earning his right to enter a privileged sphere of male power (whether this means becoming a "real" boy, succeeding to the throne, or growing a big set of antlers). In PINOCCHIO, of course, this scenario is Nazi-inflected: Pinocchio rescues his father (the Fatherland?) from a leviathan (the international Jewish banking system?), exhibiting the appropriate virtues of endurance, courage, and self-sacrifice — all the traits of a good soldier.

PINOCCHIO's sexual politics follow this fascist lead: women quite literally inhabit a "separate sphere." Procreation is transformed into an act of male creativity, which women merely ratify with their mysterious ability to "give life." Women are also repositories of "morality," encouraging virtues like honesty (although even this becomes a test of masculine self-control: Pinocchio, denying his naughtiness, is betrayed by a growing, ever more erect and unconcealable nose; learning virtue and getting this unruly organ under control are the same task.) The ideal society of

PINOCCHIO, as of the Nazis, is a disciplined, all male, warrior culture nurtured by idealized feminine domestics.

Ironically, PINOCCHIO's thick Continental ambiance and relentlessly fascist cosmology have allowed it to age better than most Disney classics. It steers clear of embarrassingly crude caricatures of *American* minorities (such as DUMBO's crows or PETER PAN's Indians). Obsessively focused on male initiation, it mercifully leaves girls alone (unlike CINDERELLA or SLEEPING BEAUTY). An epic of the *volk*, it is not, like 99% of the rest of Disney's *oeuvre*, preoccupied with the travails of royalty. Finally, it also spares us Uncle Walt's wish-fulfillment fantasies of ideal workers (unlike SNOW WHITE, in which happy dwarves sing, "Hi Ho," on their way to the mines — a vision recently given a service-industry update in BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, in which hospitality workers, transformed into household objects, sing "Be My Guest" in an orgasmic fulfillment of their biological need to serve.) Avoiding the hot buttons of concerned liberals and, of course, striking conservatives as ineffably wholesome, PINOCCHIO's 50th anniversary re-release met with no controversy.

That PINOCCHIO could, nonetheless, very well have served as a Hitler Youth training film is not simply a reflection of Uncle Walt's devotion to National Socialism. Rather, he and Hitler — as well as countless other corporate leaders, government planners, architects, cultural purveyors and social thinkers in Europe and the United States — shared an overall social vision. They dreamed of a dispersed post-urban society, with a population — kept in line by a strong domestic realm instilling a keen sense of blood loyalty and "family values" — that could be efficiently mobilized to serve either the military needs of the state or the labor needs of industry.

The chief obstacle to this utopia was the disordered realm of the cities — cauldrons of ethnic intermingling, voluntary associations (of unionists, bohemians, Communists, gays and feminists), and general squalor — which offended fascist sensibilities of order, cleanliness and efficiency. It is no coincidence that the ultimate villains of Hitler's world view were also seen as the most quintessentially urban: Jews, barred from agriculture, lived largely in cities; according to Hitler, urban squalor spread outward from their filthy ghettos. The Nazis even used a distinctly urban fauna as their chief metaphor for Jews. Like rats, Jews were inescapably "adapted" to the city. To eliminate one meant eliminating the other.

Both Hitler's and Disney's anti-urbanism was expressed as back-to-nature primitivism. Their plans, however, were in no way backward-looking. Hitler envisioned a society requiring a great deal of *lebensraum*, organized around *autobahns* and *Volkswagens* and interspersed with centers of monumental national architecture and educational "castles" in which children would imbibe their national culture. In other words, suburbia dotted with Disneylands.

We are now at the other end of the suburban explosion that originated with visionaries like Hitler and Disney. And, sure enough, the suburban reality continues to nurture the fascist visions that created it. Fifty years after PINOCCHIO (with Nazism supposedly repudiated, and Uncle Walt long since preserved in cryonic slumber to await his resurrection) THE LION KING echoes all of its fascist themes: hatred of gays, communists, and minorities, and the glorification of violent male initiation and feminine domesticity — all set in a

bucolic suburban environment under the strong leadership of an all-male state.

Above all, it speaks of the fear of cities. This time, however, the city is not a treacherous lure to simple rural folk, but an invading threat looming over the suburban paradise.

THE LION KING's inherent fascism is more frightening for its obsession with leadership. Disney's worship of one-man dictatorship, usually quaintly monarchist, is decidedly unrestrained in THE LION KING. The movie is bracketed by two elaborate sequences showing all the animals of the "kingdom" flocking to see the newborn heir to the throne: we are treated to labored pomp and ceremony, as birds soar through the mists and long rows of ungulates bow down to their devourer/king, all accompanied by portentous African-sounding music. We are meant to be as much in awe of the king's glory and power as the animators clearly are.

But pure spectacle does not suffice to get the message across to Disney's satisfaction. Mufasa, the king, spends half the movie impressing on his son, Simba, the duties and indispensability of the king, on whom the *entire natural order* seems to rest: in bland eco-speak, he explains that the king maintains "the delicate balance of nature." Unaccountably, this is eventually borne out. When the wrong king comes to power, the lush savanna becomes a wasteland from which even the rain-clouds flee. The king's importance extends to the very firmament. Mufasa explains that the stars are the spirits of past kings who guide the present one (putting a monarchist spin on traditional African ancestor worship). In the daytime, the sun is called into service; taken to Castle Rock, Simba is told that the king's domain, the Prideland, extends wherever the sun shines. Simba, listening to James Earl Jones's regal baritone, grows excited about his future role. He spends his time dreaming of his future power and singing show-stoppers like "I Can't Wait to be King."

This thinly disguised Oedipal longing puts an ace up the sleeve of Scar, Mufasa's evil and covetous brother. He plots with hyenas to put Simba in the path of a stampeding herd of wildebeest, a mishap which he uses as cover to kill Mufasa when the king tries to rescue his son. Scar convinces Simba that he is responsible for his own father's death. Simba, with a child's fear that one's wishes can have bad effects in the real world, readily accepts the blame. Flayed by a remorse that takes him most of the movie to overcome, he flees the kingdom, eventually found by a warthog-meerkat pair who raise him.

Meanwhile, Scar takes over. As the Bad Leader he brings the kingdom to ruin. Mannered and aristocratic, and clearly not producing heirs like his more manly brother, he is pointedly gay. He is also a rationalist and utilitarian, coveting the absolute power of kingship but not buying into its mystique. He exerts a corrupting influence on the young, skillfully putting all sorts of ideas into Simba's head. Worst of all, he willingly enters into an unholy alliance with the hyenas, a teeming brood of half-starved scavengers ghettoized in a "dark region." Taken as a whole, he represents that *bête-noir* of contemporary right-wingers, the Liberal Politician.

Previously, Scar had goaded Simba to disobey his father and enter the prohibited "dark region." We tumble with the lion cub and his girlfriend into space that is suddenly enclosed, vertical and without vegetation, an "elephant graveyard" amid

the cliffs. The huge elephant skeletons resemble the burnt-out shells of tall buildings, or perhaps the postindustrial remains of hulking machinery. Simba, on a dare, starts to enter a huge skull, only to be frozen in his tracks by eerie laughter. In classic hooligan fashion, three hyenas emerge and start circling Simba, taunting and threatening him. It's clear that Simba is on the wrong side of the tracks, in a bad neighborhood, surrounded by "the projects" — he's caught in the inner city.

The hyenas speak in "street voices" provided by Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Marin and clearly represent poor blacks and Hispanics. They are also stereotypical gang members, inherently criminal, cutthroat and mercenary — brawling with each other when not united by a common victim. As scavengers whose own neighborhood offers slim pickings, they eagerly accept handouts. Scar provides them: he gains the hyena's loyalty by promising them a steady stream of meat, thus creating the Welfare State.

After he usurps the throne, Scar lets the hyenas out of the "dark region" and into the Prideland, to the horror of the other species. Catastrophe follows: the lions' resources are squandered by the lazy and rapacious hyenas, who, in turn, harass the lions with petty terror. The balance of nature is upset: the herds flee, the water dries up, and the landscape soon resembles the wasteland of the elephant graveyard. The hyenas carry their blight with them; having brought down the productive ecosystem that used to provide them with scraps, their starvation only worsens. They offend Scar, who cares only about his power, by voicing nostalgia for the Mufasa regime which kept them in their place.

The lionesses, witnessing the devastation all about them, are strangely passive — even though they do all of the hunting and are collectively strong enough to kick the asses of Scar and his praetorian guard of hyenas. Instead, they abandon all hope until they rediscover Simba, the rightful heir, whom they had thought dead. By this time, Simba is utterly useless by any standard, having spent his youth doing nothing but dancing around eating bugs. But no matter: he functions as the Leader — and without a Leader, even groups who possess *all of the apparent power* are in reality helpless.

Others join in this mystical valuation of the Leader. In life, Mufasa had emphasized the importance of bloodline. In death, his ghost visits Simba to cajole him to "remember who you are" and not to break the line of kingly succession, despite his lack of training. (Unlike the more sensible ghost of Hamlet's father, Mufasa forgets to tell the guilt-ridden Simba that the father was really murdered by Scar, a revelation that would have instantly put an end to Simba's paralyzing angst.) A baboon shaman on retainer to the royal family also encourages the youth to return, explaining that Mufasa "lives on" in Simba (the shaman's motives are at least explicable: his status took a nasty drop during Scar's regime). Caught in a medieval mindset, everyone seems convinced that the ascension of the rightful heir, in itself, will reestablish harmony. The writers and animators work hard to prove them right: when Simba takes over, the waters return. Male power becomes sanctioned by the cosmos, secure even in the face of apparent obsolescence.

Simba conquers Scar in the prescribed Disney manner: through pure exertion of will. Simba is teetering on the brink of death when Scar gloatingly reveals the truth about Mufasa's death. Simba leaps forward in a sudden surge of energy and subdues his uncle, who promptly sells out the hyenas. Demonstrating kingly mercy,

Simba spares Scar — who, of course, tries one more backstab before he's done in by angry and betrayed hyenas, the very unsavory types he has spent his years pandering to. A fitting end to the Liberal Politician.

THE LION KING has a clear political agenda: end the welfare state, barricade the suburbs against the inner city, and replace liberal politicians with true, authoritarian leaders. It works: Simba's kingdom becomes once again green and stuffed with prey. The hyenas remain quarantined in their ghetto; the balance of nature, each species in its own habitat, becomes restored. The urban poor are evidently as unassimilable to mainstream U.S. society as Jews were to the society of Hitler's dreams. THE LION KING's recap of classically fascist themes bodes ill. Since Disney's animated extravaganzas reappeared with THE LITTLE MERMAID, they have been a weirdly accurate barometer of the "national political mood," including a brief liberal flourish around the time of Clinton's election.

Disney's 1980s features reflected the neo-conservative preoccupation with personal morality and "family values." They consist mainly of family dramas, bent on achieving proper heterosexual couple bonding despite the odds. The female leads in all three are restless and eager to escape their fathers' realms, an impulse which puts them in danger until they arrive safely into their husbands' arms. The males are all, at first, unworthy of full patriarchal responsibility but, in true PINOCCHIO fashion, overcome their weaknesses and, through exertions of will, defeat their foes and become fit successors to their wives' fathers. But there to thwart this happy outcome, simultaneously trying to usurp heterosexual power and distract the hero from the heroine, is that neocon bugaboo — the *gay male*. In an age when anti-semitism has fallen out of vogue and Communism, not taken seriously, he has to bear the full brunt of fascist animus.

At first glance, Ursula, the villain in THE LITTLE MERMAID, seems a woman; on closer inspection, however, the Sea Witch resembles a flamboyant, Divine-ly inspired drag queen. Her octopus-like lower half further renders her gender ambiguous: the first view of her tentacles emerging from the darkness is played up for shock value (not unlike a similar view in THE CRYING GAME). Ursula eventually pulls off a drag queen's coup. She takes on the appearance of a svelte brunette, speaks with the Little Mermaid's stolen voice (solving a chronic problem for female impersonators), and seduces the virile young prince into marrying her. She reveals the deception by literally splitting the seams of her disguise, emerging in her opulent glory; she manages to reduce the hypermasculine Sea King to a pathetic plant and only gets defeated when the virile prince impales her with the prow of a ship, thus contrasting his erect phallus with her flaccid ones. Her threat to heterosexual pair-bonding and patriarchal power is thus laid to rest.

The gay villain of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is, by contrast, hypermasculine. Gaston, vain and preening, covets heterosexual status in pursuing Belle, the beauty of the title; but he constantly ignores both her and the trio of blonde bombshells that swoon over him. He is only truly interested in male gazes, and blossoms in the midst of his all-male lodge, where he sings a showstopper celebrating his own masculinity. Provided, like The Fox, with an elastic, high-contact companion, he is the epitome of camp. Mainly a figure of comic relief, he's hard to take very seriously. The true evil of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, in fact, lies elsewhere: in the sexual dysfunction of the hero, who suffers from what clinicians call "infantile

narcissism." The witch's curse simply brings his fetishism — in which inanimate objects are endowed with ego-fulfilling life — out into the open, transforming his castle into something like Pee Wee's Playhouse. Constant parallels between his actions and Gaston's link his condition with Gaston's more deeply entrenched sexual deviance. He finally breaks the curse — defeating Gaston and restoring his realm to "normal" — by embracing a prosaic heterosexuality with Belle.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is a men's movement response to feminist nagging. It is engorged with anxiety that masculinity might be a mask for homosexuality; or that natural male narcissism might forever alienate the women that feminism has made so intolerant. In the end, it is a plea that women understand and love men's "beasts within" (their inner "wild men"), and help mother them into maturity. It is early 1990s wish fulfillment.

ALLADIN represents a surprising liberal aberration from Disney's right-wing trajectory. To be sure, the villain is still gay: Jafar is dark, effeminate, and prissily evil; Scar simply repeats Jafar in the shape of a lion. Jafar, however, very much acts the role of a gay man's gay villain, twisted by his desire for heterosexual power and his consequent self-enclosure in the closet. Advisor to the sultan, he is a Roy Cohn type with Leopold-and-Loeb overtones. He is counterpoised, moreover, to a healthier gay icon: the Genie, who, with Robin Williams's voice, flames across the screen in a one-man cabaret show. (Of course, a male genie is already sexually suspect in a culture whose TV-sitcom associations mark genies as female.) The Genie shifts gender several times and uses his transformative powers to generally wreak havoc on social categories, making street urchins into princes.

The other heroes are hippie twenty-somethings. Princess Jasmine wants to "break the rules" of her restrictive society. Aladdin woos her by taking her on a "magic carpet ride" to "a whole new world," a barely concealed acid trip. In the end, Aladdin *renounces* power by setting the Genie free from his lamp (releasing him from the closet, as it were). Happily, renouncing power ends up winning it for him, as he is put next in line for the sultanhip. (He will no doubt be a cool sultan, treating his subjects to free concerts and, if possible, high-fat chunky ice-cream.)

Aladdin is everything Clinton was supposed to have been: of the people, hippie-ish, a friend to gays, and willing to renounce "politics as usual." ALLADIN embodies other liberalish themes: a sympathy with the urban poor, and an understanding of crime (like stealing) as a response to circumstances. Above all, ALLADIN embodies that strange liberal vision of social justice as nothing more than an United States in which Horatio Alger stories can once again come true.

With THE LION KING, the liberals have been ousted, in sync with the real conservative agenda of Clintonism and, more recently, with the Newt juggernaut: with its get-tough crime bill, its welfare reform, and its promises to restore to the middle class its lost paradise of 50s suburbia. The reclamation of suburbia, with its "traditional" values, forms the core of THE LION KING's story. Mufasa, it should be remembered, reigns over a rather odd kingdom: namely, of things he eats. There are no other lions in evidence (save Scar, his free-loading brother), and the lionesses are all dutiful domestic servants. Like a suburbanite ruling over a kingdom of appliances, cars, and household technology, Mufasa lords over a realm of consumables.

Simba, like Aladdin, goes the 1960s counterculture route. In *THE LION KING*, this is more clearly a shift in styles of consumption: from big-ticket antelope to brightly colored, smallscale, shiny designer insects. His pseudoparents, a meerkat and warthog, engage in an "alternative lifestyle," living as a couple to the exclusion of females of their own species. Their motto is slacker and multi-cultural: the Swahili "hakuna matada" — "who cares?" When Simba's former betrothed appears, he seems ready for free love. In the end, however, he is successfully exhorted to give up his irresponsible "alternative" lifestyle and, in one stroke, reclaim his "traditional" values and his father's kingdom. If we want to recreate the paradise of the 1950s, we have but to conquer the liberals and their decadent lifestyles.

In the 50 years since Walt Disney made *PINOCCHIO*, history has gone his way — that is to say, the wrong way. Resource-draining, environment-destroying suburbs have sprawled out of control, creating a centrifugal force that has not only reinforced segregation by race and income, but atomized humans to an unheard of extent. U.S. visions of collective action, both of the privileged and the oppressed, have almost completely decomposed into fascist fantasies of blood and soil. As the stockpiles of arms build up behind the ever more pervasive barricades, we are told that what everybody wants — and deeply needs — is a great leader.

It is an index of Walt Disney's success that *THE LION KING* and its social message could be explained without any reference to him. *PINOCCHIO* is impossible to imagine without the man behind it, with his psychic imbalances and ideological preoccupations; the fascism in *PINOCCHIO* came straight from Uncle Walt's heart. By contrast, *THE LION KING* was made by a studio run by Jews; the music was written by gays; many of the characters were voiced by respected black actors; and the writers were liberal enough to give the film a "multicultural" veneer. Its underlying fascism is not so much the product of a demonic individual. It simply *reflects* the "American reality" — a reality whose ugliness is not hard to discern below the slick surface of bland music and cute, fuzzy animals.

Wide Sargasso Sea Imperial travesty

by Carey Snyder and Eric Anders

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The passionate embrace of two wet lovers in the promotional shot for John Duigan's *WIDE SARGASSO SEA* beckons viewers to watch a film filled with sensuous, exotic encounters. Blockbuster classifies the video as an "erotic romance," and the description on the back of the box reads:

"The exotic beauty of the Caribbean masks the secrets of sensual pleasure and dark temptation. From the critically-acclaimed novel by Jean Rhys comes a tale of erotic obsession..."

Reviews of this cinematic adaptation of Jean Rhys's 1966 narrative extension of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* verify that the film has been perceived as the promoters intended: a steamy romance set in the inebriating tropical setting of nineteenth century Jamaica. Siskel and Ebert give this "sensual and romantic" film their "two thumbs up," and Siskel adds that this "gripping tale of erotic love" is "refreshingly adult in its sensuality." Siskel's comment is particularly troubling since the sex in this film includes rape and attempted rape. Is this adult sexuality in our culture?

Duigan's film, however, should not be blamed for its promotion — that is, unless it merits the classification "erotic romance" that Blockbuster awards it. If so, Duigan's film is a travesty. For Rhys's impressionistic novella is not a steamy romance. In many ways, it is a psychological anti-romance more in the tradition of *Wuthering Heights* than its literary ancestor. In the novella, sexuality is represented obliquely, and forms a powerful undercurrent that has thematic significance in a work concerned with the violation that Victorian imperialism and sexism entails. Making sex explicit in the film — and packaging it in such a way that evokes the feeling of a tropical romance — obscures the political significance of Rhys' work. To understand what is at stake in the cinematic adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we need to understand the film's literary lineage.

As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, *Jane Eyre* charts a "life journey" that is an odyssey of Jane's finding selfhood, even sanity, by finding love based on equality with Rochester. They recall that when orphan Jane is locked up as a child, she is afraid that she might be considered

insane, a "bad animal" (7). Later threatening the possibility of matrimony that will provide Jane social legitimacy is "the madwoman in the attic," a refiguring of that feared self — an "animal" locked in a room whom Gilbert and Gubar dub "Jane's darkest double" (342). As a Creole heiress from Jamaica, Rochester's former wife Bertha shares with Jane outsider status. However, as Gayatri Spivak argues, Jane's upward mobility depends on Bertha's conflagration: the colonial "other" conveniently goes up in flames with Rochester's house so *Jane Eyre* can have a conventional happy ending.

Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* gives subjectivity to the white Creole native, by imagining a childhood for Bertha and a method to her madness. Like the novel by which it was inspired, Rhys' novella deals with the harsh reality of a period that denied legal selfhood to women in marriage, while offering few alternatives to female helplessness and dependency. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, whose plot reinforces a myth of British superiority as well as "purity," free from colonial "contamination," *Wide Sargasso Sea* directly interrogates the legacy of slavery and imperialism. From the British perspective portrayed in Rhys' novella, Antoinette figures as a cultural bastard, contaminated by the colonial slavery with which she has come into contact — slavery and imperialism that have helped to build the British Empire and that England, in both novels, would like to forget. Born into a family of slaveholders, the sins of her father(s) are visited upon her. Obviously hated by the black native population who refer to them as "white cockroaches, Antoinette and her family are "at home" neither in Jamaica, nor in England. From Rochester's perspective she is an inimical "other," whose foreignness is threatening.

Like Jane's, Antoinette's story is an odyssey where the heroine attempts to escape the madness of isolation and social inequality through a relationship with Rochester. The subjectivity with which Rhys has endowed her, however, is at counter-purposes to the film's attempt to portray her primarily through Rochester's eyes: as mysterious and therefore opaque. For instance, Antoinette's friendship with her "dark double," Tia — important in its failing because it establishes the extent of Antoinette's profound solitude — is flattened and compressed into a brief scene. Playmates socialized in a racist society, each girl ultimately rejects the other, foreclosing the possibility of intimacy. The film also omits a central episode which defines Antoinette's ambivalence toward Christophine, the servant who has served as her surrogate mother. In front of Christophine's house, Rhys' Antoinette inwardly declares,

"This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay" (108).

Hers is a fantasy of belonging. But when Christophine advises her not to go to England, Antoinette reverts to racism that contributes to her doom:

"How can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman...?" (112).

The heroine of *Wide Sargasso Sea* imagines that she is entitled to the status ostensibly due to a woman aligned with a position of cultural hegemony — that she is superior to this native who has nursed and consoled her. Her legacy as the daughter of a slave owner is to contribute to oppression, while being herself oppressed; she is tortured by her conflicted place in fields of power and desire.

Antoinette's madness in this context derives from her sense of alienation as one without any supportive culture to mirror her identity. Yet in the film her madness is romanticized; it presumably derives from her all-consuming "love" of Rochester. Antoinette's choice to leave the Caribbean and Christophine in Duigan's version is uncomplicated by her feelings of racial superiority. The film does not present even a hypothetical choice between staying with her surrogate mother/servant or going with her lover. Part of what is lost in the cinematic adaptation is the subtlety and depth of Antoinette's character, which is compromised by a film that perhaps not intentionally re-objectifies its subject. During the couple's consummatory embrace, for example, the camera's gaze is gendered male, sliding over Antoinette's body in a way that aligns the viewer with Rochester and allows both to "consume this foreign object of desire. Antoinette's experience and identity here are neglected.

Forfeiting of identity is dramatized in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Rochester's re-naming his wife, whom Rhys has christened Antoinette, as Bertha. This is a symbolic gesture of his mastery over her. Duigan may have tried to preserve this symbol of patriarchal/imperialist domination in his filmic interpretation, but inexplicably imposes a third name on Antoinette/ Bertha, which could pass as a nickname: Nette. Simply having Rochester abridge Antoinette's given name suggests that Duigan is unaware of the violence of renaming represented by Rhys. "Nette" does not as radically suggest Rochester's colonizing spirit as Bertha does, for Bertha is chosen merely because he fancies the name (the way one names a pet). In the same spirit of perhaps unintentional irony, Duigan changes the name of a native called "Baptiste" to Nelson (perhaps because it sounds less foreign?). This careless renaming suggests that Duigan is identifying a little too closely with Rochester.

Although we hear Antoinette's voice in the beginning of the film, Rochester's perspective seems to engulf all but the closing scene. Furthermore, the film moves to redeem him. In a peculiar way this begins with Rochester's passing out upon introduction to Antoinette and by his awkwardness following this meeting. His actions make him look foolish, but also less formidable. They are comical rather than tragic in effect. When Rochester learns that Antoinette is having second thoughts about marriage, he reluctantly concedes in the book that he "can't drag her to the Altar." This fact is deeply resented:

"I thought that this would make a fool of me. I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl. I must certainly know why."

Duigan revises Rochester's bullyish character by omitting these indignant lines and inserting instead the good-sportish: "I don't blame her" [for not wanting to marry me], and,

"Perhaps she will let me give it another try."

If the filmmaker cannot be reproached for introducing some levity via Rochester's fainting (a visual allusion to his general light-headedness in Jamaica), matters become more serious when this character's sadism is diluted by the film.

The film's plot is propelled forward predominantly by sex, not, as in the

impressionistic novella, by dream and introspection. Rhys's narrative does suggest that Rochester is threatened by Antoinette's sexuality; indeed this is the primary way that he perceives her — "wild with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness" (73). But whereas sex itself is obliquely treated in Rhys' novella, in Duigan's filmic interpretation these secondary allusions are made primary and explicit. Rape occurs center stage, erotically packaged, then morally rationalized by its marital context. After being raped, Antoinette coos maternally, "*It's all right*," as she caresses the perpetrator. This pardoning is entirely of the filmmaker's invention. Antoinette's mounting rage is represented by the film when, as Rochester attempts to rape her again, she spits in his face. But this is presented as a direct response to Rochester's infidelity — not to more general outrage about being objectified and violently dealt with. And again, the film salvages a modicum of sympathy for Rochester by representing his remorse after the attempted rape, depicting him holding back tears.

Before embarking to England, Rhys' narrative also makes it clear that Rochester gets off on his legal entitlement to Antoinette/ Bertha's very person through marriage.

"I could not touch her [yet]. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree — and break it. You say I did? No. That was love's fierce play. Now I'll do it" (136).

The film elides lines that express his malevolent possessiveness as well:

"I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but *mine, mine*" (138).

In partially ameliorating Rochester's character (not completely, for it is basically contemptible), Duigan purges the "passion" of some of its violence even as he portrays rape, thus making it okay for the viewer to enjoy the eroticism and to ponder the political and psychosocial symbolism only as an after thought. Somewhere along the line the issues of Rhys' narrative get so buried in red orchids and bare midriffs that some viewers conclude that this is an island romance. Doubtless it is easier to market erotica than to market an indictment of the kind of exploitation that is so much a part of this culture's history and present. But such an ironic distortion, where the film on one level exemplifies what the novel on many levels indicts — exploitation in the interest of profit — makes this film betray the political spirit of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

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PBS: postmodern media museum

by Laura Denham

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"Conservative theorists tend to see mass culture as mechanical rather than organic, secular rather than sacred, commercial rather than free or unconditioned, plebeian and vulgar, rather than aristocratic and 'noble', based on self interest rather than on high ideals, or appealing to the worst instinct in people rather than the best; cheap and shoddy, rather than enduring, imitative rather than original, urban, bureaucratic and centralized rather than close to nature, communal and individualized."
— Paul Bratlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*

The concerns of "negative classicism" — those sentiments described here by Bratlinger unfavorably equating the popular with the profane — have not only targeted mass culture in general, but not surprisingly form the body of much debate concerning mass culture's most dominant medium: television. Not only is the medium, by nature, a "populist" one due to the accessibility afforded it by the technology of *mass* communications. But since broadcasting's earliest directive in selling TV sets and then other sponsors products through advertising, television also remains inextricably linked to consumerism. Both associations have traditionally led to a certain denigration of television as a cultural realm. Availability somewhat desanctifies, cheapens and inadvertently dilutes television's value as an art form, while commercialism has pejoratively coded the medium as film's mercenary cousin, much to the detriment of TV's cultural placement and reception. John Ellis, for example, suggests that "the gaze" of the cinema viewer is replaced by the "glance" of the TV viewer, a look that is both distracted and powerless.^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) Yet encounters with commercialism and (perceived) cultural truancy extend beyond television itself. In consumer capitalist society, such culturally vacuous experiences arguably comprise much of that entire cultural dominant known as postmodernism.

According to the ubiquitous postmodern commentator Jean Baudrillard, consumer capitalism abstracts the meaning of "value" by establishing a law of equivalence (money), which liquidates the referential and ultimately contributes to the dissolution of identity. The blurred distinction between original and copy, cause and effect, subject and object, results in a confounded sense of the real, which, in turn, leads us to seek ethical and cultural re-grounding: to engage in what Baudrillard has called the panic-stricken production of the real and the referential.

If commercial television purveys postmodern values, an escape valve for the "panic stricken" audience might well be found in the arena of *public* television (here in San Francisco, KQED Channel 9), which supposedly rejects consumerism by professing to exclude advertisements, while simulating a sense of meaning and tradition in its mostly nostalgic programming. Originally created in 1953 and given a mandate for expansion by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, public television was designed to provide a forum for *education*. Its conscientious, non-commercial, antithetical construction and self-appointment as an *alternative*, thereby implied, in the aforementioned tradition, the mindless or low-brow nature of the rest of television broadcasting. The 1967 Carnegie Commission on Educational Television states,

"Through the diversified uses of television, Americans will know themselves, their communities, and their world in richer ways. They will gain a fuller awareness of the wonder and the variety of the arts, the sciences, scholarship, and craftsmanship, and of the many roads along which the products of man's mind and man's hand can be encountered." [3]

Today the public television concept of "educational," of what is "high culture" and good for the mind, is extensively shaped by the means by which it is funded. In the information provided to its prospective sponsors KQED boasts the following statistics: Of KQED member households, 90% attended college, 51% hold professional, managerial or technical positions and, in comparison to non-viewers, are 60% more likely to have addressed a public meeting in the past year. However, viewers are not in this position because they watch public television, but rather they watch public television because the station deliberately caters to them. In administering a dose of "high culture" to the wealthy (who are, in comparison to non-viewers, twice as likely to own \$50,000 more in stock, 60% more likely to own money market funds, and of whom 89% own investments) Channel 9 ensures support from the corporate giants who help its survival. Carefully pandering to its corporate underwriters, KQED is as pro-business as a commercial station. Moreover, the business of programming for wealthy, educated professionals epitomizes postmodern cultural patterns of revivalism and escapist nostalgia.

CULTURE IN A BOX

Public television programming compounds television's already substitutionary nature by aiming to reflect lost social realms and experiences and to adopt or simulate to a greater or lesser degree "higher" cultural forms. In a letter to the 1967 Educational Television Commission, later quoted by President Johnson in his message to Congress regarding the 67 Act, E.B. White writes,

"I think television should be the visual counterpart of the literary essay, should arouse dreams, satisfy our hunger for beauty, take us on our journeys, enable us to participate in events, present great drama and music, and explore the sea and the sky and the woods and the hills. It should be our Lyceum, our Chatouauqua, our Minsky's, and our Camelot." [Carnegie Report, p.13]

In one fell swoop he endorses the agenda by which television "counterfeits" literature, travel, live performing arts and nature, an agenda significantly evident in the prevailing scheduling patterns of San Francisco's KQED Channel 9. A glance at any recent Channel 9 schedule reveals a number of time slots, each with its own generic heading — *Nature*, *Animals*, *Mystery*, *American Playhouse*, *Masterpiece Theatre*, *Nightly Business Report*, *Great Performances* — each indicative of the particular precious experience it attempts to provide.

A Sony advertisement features a TV set perched on the edge of the Grand Canyon. Its screen displays a crisp image of the surrounding landscape. When a family rushes excitedly to the great geographical wonder, they turn a blind eye to the "real" canyon and choose instead to watch its image on TV. Likewise in *Family Viewing*, Atom Egoyan's wry study of television watching and image culture, one member of the family, notably surrounded by the electronic screen, seeks some sanctuary in his continual viewing of wildlife programs. Both examples comment on the role of Nature shows in urban society. KQED's nature and animal slots are often positioned at primetime, and usually consist of film footage and commentary on the feeding, hunting or mating habits of a wild species, or the plant life and topography of an undeveloped landscape. Rather like an exercise bike that provides the city dweller with a second rate bike ride in the comfort of his or her living room, these televisual encounters with Mother Nature are always the reflection of a basic reality, but simultaneously may mask the absence of our accessibility and proximity to this reality in a post industrial environment. The same might be said of public television's multitudinous travel documentaries, often featuring journeys by train (the BBC's *Great Railway Journey* series, or *Last Train Across Canada*) and thus also paying wistful homage to a mode of transport considered fantastically quaint in an age of airlines and freeways.

Closer to home, programs such as *This Old House*, *Yan Can Cook*, *Today's Gourmet*, *Julia Child* and *Hometime* provide instruction on home improvements and cookery at the same time as creating a reassuring sense of (once) familiar domestic and family values in a possible context of nuclear family disintegration and alienation.

Beyond the "real world" public television's *Great Performances* provide a slice of artistic puritanism with the screening of ballet, symphony and opera. While arguably bringing classical arts to a mass audience who would otherwise be unable to experience them, televising performances contrarily further emphasizes both the elitist nature of the high arts and the "second hand" nature of television viewing. Most of the performances are pre-recorded (often years old, since as with Nature, this is a generic experience, any "great performance" will do). The excitement of "liveness" is absent. The scale of the performance diminished by the small screen, and the viewer perhaps somewhat displaced by the awareness of the actual audience, who were privileged to attend the real event. Opera, symphony and ballet, furthermore, are no more educational than, for example, video art, a form much better suited to the TV medium. Their placement on public television again speaks of reproduction in reverence of history and tradition.

The yearning for a pre-electronic age is equally evident in another PBS favorite, *Masterpiece Theatre*. Ironically, yet typically, this experience is not theater at all, but usually consists of the adaptation of a literary classic or dramatization of the

life of a historical figure, episodically presented on television. Television viewing, normally associated with passive consumption, becomes legitimized by its procurement of a "Masterpiece," itself a loaded word connoting excellence, classicism, and history through its association with the traditionally revered arts of painting, theater and literature.

Admittedly hoards of viewers may seek to read a pedagogical novel after seeing it televised. But perversely, then, we accept the copy before encountering the original, with the television adaptation becoming Baudrillard's "map that precedes the territory" (Baudrillard, p. 2). (A more cautionary example might be made of the program *Sesame Street*, which, according to Neil Postman, offers no substitute for the classroom and teaches children not to love learning, but to love television.) [3] *Masterpiece Theatre* not only reveals the association of "education" with "literature" but the type of literature presented itself promotes a sense of history and old fashioned values.

Upstairs Downstairs, for example, which first aired in 1974, is a soap opera spanning from 1903 through 1930 exploring the relationships within a large English family. It juxtaposes the lives of the family members with those of its servants, specifically emphasizing the peculiarities of class structure, as suggested by the series title. Another random example of human grandiosity is evident in the series *Poldark*, whose one-time popularity with U.S. audiences is explained by Alistair Cook in his book *Masterpieces*:

"He is a soldier whose manly instincts are only fleetingly clouded by misgivings or second thoughts. He is decent, plucky, generous, brisk and positive. He sees in Warleggen a villain as straightforward as the Soviet Union. Whatever else he is, Poldark is not vulnerable. He is Ronald Reagan. In an unsettled and brooding time, his landslide election by a huge and grateful audience as favorite *Masterpiece Theatre* hero should not, after all, have been such a surprise." [4]

Elsewhere, too, *Masterpiece Theatre* has celebrated pre-industrial heroes and life in the old country, from the epitome of classicism, *I, Claudius*, through the English monarchy (*The Six Wives of Henry VIII*; *Elizabeth R*), from the anguish and moral drama of the nineteenth century continental giants, (*Therese Raquin*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Anna Karenina*) to the bucolic settings of rural England (*The Little Farm*, *Love For Lydia*, *Middlemarch*).

The *Carnegie Report*'s promise in 1967 that Public Television "will respect the old and new alike, neither lunging at the present or worshipping the past" [Carnegie Report, p.18] has clearly been broken. *Masterpiece Theatre*, now something of a byword for public television — along with *Mystery* which is similarly grafted to English literature such as the class-ridden works of Agatha Christie — exemplifies the equation of quality with history so integral to theories of nostalgia and postmodernism. Much contemporary nostalgia takes the form of pastiche or parody whereby retrospection or repetition fondly mocks the value or integrity of the original. Public television's artistic fare, conversely, tends to museumize rather than to parody. We preserve relics, Baudrillard writes, because

"our entire linear and accumulative culture would collapse if we could not stockpile the past in plain view."

"We need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin to reassure us as to our ends. [*Simulations*, p.19]

Unlike parody, public television's arts and drama maintains a certain reverence for the original, a faith in the real referent. In Jameson's terms,

"We are left with a random collection of images to which we turn in a frantic effort to appropriate a collective past." [5]

BUYING BRITISH

The obsession with the past may also account for the Eurocentric nature of much PBS material and the predominance of British drama, (*Masterpiece Theater* even maintains the British spelling). The so-called Founding Fathers, who established many of America's cultural institutions were, after all, from Britain. And it's perhaps this "mother country" more than any other single European power that still bears the delusory legacy of tradition and cultural grounding. Accordingly, Channel 9 broadcast two hour-long documentaries on members of Britain's Royal Family — notably featuring two of the more maternal figures, Diana and The Queen — with both shows airing on the same night and following swiftly in the well-heeled footsteps of a similar program on the English monarchy's social wardrobe.

Nostalgic American Anglophiles, in fact, provide some security for Britain's international television market. To ensure success overseas, a British production need only place familiar national stereotypes in a country handsomely costumed as an orderly, hierarchized society. The formula is inveterate: *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Brideshead Revisited*. However bogus a conception, Britain apparently represents the past, and by association, quality.

SAME OLD SAME OLD

Public television, with its concern for artistic merit, does well to purchase from British companies, whose production revenues, whether from the sale of audiences to advertisers (ITV) or from the sale of broadcast receiving licenses (BBC) were, up until the late SOs, effectively rationed by the government to only four broadcast channels, thereby permitting a high budget and high productions values. Yet, although PBS may purchase from Britain, the U.S. public television station bears little resemblance overall to any British station. Unlike the BBC, U.S. public television was created as an alternative to the commercial entertainment that *preceded* it, and the "quality" fare here appeared all on the same channel, causing special problems regarding scheduling, variety and flow.

The British Broadcasting Corporation's programming was initially based on Lord Reith's policy that "it is better to overestimate the mentality of the public than to underestimate it." [6] However, by 1955 commercial television was introduced, due largely to the Tory alliance with commercial forces who saw the opportunity for profitable expansion. In order to ensure audiences and advertising sales, program content on the new ITV was crafted to suit the lowest common denominator. As Roland Gillette of Associated Rediffusion, an ITV advocate, said at the time,

"The public likes girls, wrestling, bright musicals, quiz shows and real

life drama... From now on, what the public wants it's going to get." [7]

In response, the BBC began to combine their upper crust programs with more entertaining TV entities, the transition of some of their most "intellectual" stuff to BBC 2, created in 1964, leaving BBC 1 with more room to compete with ITV. A recent British television schedule[8] reveals continuing diversity on the two public stations. On a randomly selected Wednesday night, for example, British news and talk shows on BBC 1 are followed by the U.S. sitcom *Doogie Howser MD* at 7:35 p.m.. Meanwhile on BBC 2, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* at 6:00 p.m. is followed by an MTV style youth culture show, *Def II*, which in turn is pursued at 8:10 p.m. with a documentary about a Polish author. Similarly, on a Saturday, BBC 2's prime time juxtaposes *The Civil War* with ABC's *Twin Peaks*, followed by the African film *Yeelen*. Sunday BBC 1 offers two sitcoms, the Olivier Awards at 8:15 p.m., the news at 9:35 p.m., then a quiz show and a documentary.

Contrary to Johnson's hope in 1967 that, in the U.S., too, the strength of public television should lie in its diversity, a similar cross section of Channel 9's schedule reveals frequent repetition and monotony.[9] Of the 175 slots listed in San Francisco *Focus* magazine, approximately one third are repeated during the week on Channel 9 or another local PBS affiliate. Re-runs of ancient *Masterpiece Theater* series — *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1972), *I, Claudius* (1977), *Upstairs Downstairs* (1974-77), *Elizabeth R* (1972) — were broadcast in February and March of 1991 masquerading as *M.T.*'s 20th anniversary celebration (and suggesting nostalgia within the PBS arena itself!). One Monday night characteristically reveals between the prime time hours of 7:30 and 10:30 p.m. no less than four nature shows — *World of Animals*, *Miracle Planet*, *Nature*, and *Rainforest* — back to back. For our wonderful corporate subscribers, a single Friday in September 1995 offers consecutive broadcasts of *McNeill-Lehrer Newshour*, *Nightly Business Report*, *Wall Street Week* and *Washington Week In Review*. An entire night may be equally relentlessly devoted to music, with *Great Performances* from 8:00-10:30 p.m., followed by *Andy Williams* until midnight. And to persistently describe individual programs, bought through cultural shopping from other sources, with generic headings (*Nature*, *Mystery*, etc.) further prohibits even the semblance of diversity.

The Carnegie Report, in a section ironically entitled "flexibility of Scheduling," expounds this (now misguided) artistic and intellectual directive:

"Television is, among other things, a narrative medium which functions within and against a flow of time. Here, as in the poem, the play, the symphony, man seeks to give humanly significant form to the irrepressible flow of time...public television should free the creative artist and technician to explore the full uses of the medium, allowing them to give priority to aesthetic motive, to the moral and intellectual quest." (Carnegie Report, p. 971)

While commercial stations fragment their flow, effectively perpetuating in their viewers something of a magazine mentality, public television apparently laments the death of the mythical, pre-TV, long attention span. Its scheduling patterns deny the attractively abstract nature of the TV medium in an attempt to disguise it as a more "classical" artistic form.

CHANGING CHANNELS

Despite its often archival, conservative nature, credit should be given to public television's slight, but nonetheless existent, innovative edge. Ground was broken 1988 when Congress passed a law creating a new independent production service to expand the creative boundaries of PBS, allocating it \$6 million a year for the next three years. Apparently, though, local stations can turn down newly produced work on their own criteria. While KQED has exhibited local film and video makers in their excellent *Living Room Festival* and *P.O.V.* series, including works of a politically controversial nature, the station's obstinate "safety first" political policy can deliberate create broadcasting obstacles.

When KQED considered airing *Deadly Deception*, local video maker Debra Chasnoff's Oscar-winning expose of General Electric's nuclear weapons involvement, they stubbornly argued that the program did not meet their standards with regard to its partial funding by non-profit anti-nuclear group INFAC (a sponsor deemed by KQED to be self-interested and propagandist). Although Chasnoff rejected the suggestion that the show be preceded by a preface announcing the station's opinion that the program was "inappropriate," when KQED finally aired *Deadly Deception*, the station followed the example of fellow PBS affiliate WNET in allowing GE to follow the program with a corporate disclaimer, thereby giving the final word to the corporation and not to the artist.

To its credit KQED started 1994 by showcasing an adaptation of Armistead Maupin's San Francisco based, and relatively risqué *Tales of the City* — but it's worth noting that the series was a picturesque British production, half of which was shot on a sound stage in L.A.. At the start of the 1990s, locally produced programs totaled about 75 hours, about 90 minutes a week, down from 250 hours a decade ago.[10] A more stimulating, accessible alternative to commercial television's values might be found on any local no-holds-barred community access channel.

Return once more to the public television schedule, and the station's dry, archaic tone reveals itself: A Sunday morning children's show features morally reassuring fairy tales under the significant title *Long Ago and Far Away*. And even the series called *Nova (New)* is on this particular occasion a documentary about dinosaurs. Despite incessant cries for change from an infamously progressive artistic and political community, KQED has been slow to respond. While continually promising to newly prioritize its programming, changes in scheduling patterns have been so slight and infrequent as to be virtually indiscernible. In catering to the stock-owning sector and privileging the old and familiar, public television remains something of an elitist cultural museum, and as such its programs remain both as conservative and as escapist as the popular television culture it attempts to counterbalance.

NOTES

1. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television and Video* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 91-108.

2. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983) and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities... Or the End of the Social and Other Essays* (New

York: Semiotexte, 1983).

3. *Public Television: A Program For Action. The Report and Recommendations of the Carnegie Commission On Educational Television* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 13.

3. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse In The Age Of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985) p. 143.

4. Alistair Cook, *Masterpieces*, p. 53.

5. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984), pp. 64, 65.

6. Reith's "Broadcast Over Britain" quoted in Stephen Lambert, *Channel Four* (London: BR, 1982), p. 6.

7. Quoted in Andrew Quickie, *Tomorrow's Television* (Herts: Lion, 1976), p. 43.

8. *Time Out* (No. 1076, April 3-10), pp. 138-146

9. *SF Focus* (Vol. 38, No. 3, 3/91), pp. 22-23, and *San Francisco Examiner: TV Guider* (March 3 and April 14, 1991)

10. *San Francisco Examiner* 7/23/90, p. D1.

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Rising Sun: Interview with activist Guy Aoki **Total eclipse of the Sun**

by Robert M. Payne

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The institutional racism of the U.S. entertainment industry might appear obvious to most film scholars, but not to the general public. Although academics have spilled gallons of ink over Hollywood's conservative representation of race, it's still easier to find a newspaper or television commentator blasting the movies as the mouthpiece of a "liberal elite." With few critical studies of racial imagery reaching beyond the ivory tower, the burden to publicize the biases of the media frequently falls to the misrepresented communities themselves. And because of this, many have started their own media-watch groups.

One of these is the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (M.A.N.A.A.), based in Los Angeles. Founded in 1992 by Guy Aoki and George Toshio Johnston, this organization grew out of the awareness that little was being done to publicly criticize the circumscribed portrayals of Asian Americans and Asian nationals in mainstream media: Such recurring stereotypes as the Fu Manchu-style Asian villain or the Madame Butterfly-style Asian female love interest (always for a white hero) were going largely unchallenged. So, Aoki and Johnston put together an organization of concerned community volunteers who would discuss media issues and work to counterbalance any particularly objectionable productions that perpetuated these stereotypes. Aoki's sense of activism grew out of his involvement with the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (N.C.R.R.), a grass-roots organization that successfully lobbied Congress to compensate the survivors of the Japanese American internment during World War II.

Since its founding, M.A.N.A.A.'s actions have included alerting media producers to the offensiveness of their material and requesting that it be changed. Most of M.A.N.A.A.'s work is done behind the scenes, but the organization will publicize its disputes with producers when it believes that its concerns aren't being taken seriously. M.A.N.A.A. continues to monitor the media and gathers calls from the community on its information hotline. Aoki and Johnston also raise awareness about the media through their weekly column, "Into the Next Stage," which is published by the *Rafu Shimpo*, a Japanese American community newspaper in Los Angeles.

But M.A.N.A.A.'s most conspicuous action was its 1993 protest against Philip Kaufman's thriller *RISING SUN*. This film was based on the controversial mystery

novel of the same name by best-selling author Michael Crichton. The book used the police-procedural genre to frame a series of arguments against Japan's unscrupulous business practices in the U.S. Ostensibly trying to solve the murder of a white woman in the L.A. office building of a powerful Japanese corporation, the investigating detectives encounter, at every turn, tirades against Japan's predatory economic power. Crichton claimed to be most critical of U.S. corporations for selling out to "Japan Inc.," but many decried *Rising Sun* as racist.

Apparently, Twentieth Century Fox wasn't worried about alienating its Asian American audience. Despite the concerns voiced by many in the Asian American community, the studio still decided to convert this racially contentious novel into its major summer release of 1993, giving the production a massive \$40-million budget. While it's difficult to imagine any Hollywood studio pouring the same kind of resources into a movie that might actively offend the African American market, Fox left the disturbing message that Asian Americans sensitive to the perceived racism of Crichton's novel could be written off.

The film *RISING SUN* begins with the (fictional) Nakamoto Corporation trying to buy out an L.A. defense contractor, a sale opposed by U.S. Senator John Morton (Ray Wise). The business negotiations are overseen by Nakamoto's U.S. lawyer, Bob Richmond (Kevin Anderson). When the corpse of call-girl Cheryl Lynn Austin (Tatjana Patitz) is discovered in the Nakamoto board room during a high-profile party, L.A.P.D. detectives Web Smith (Wesley Snipes) and Japanese-educated John Connor (Sean Connery) are called in to investigate. Connor educates Smith in Japanese customs, and their participation is resented by xenophobic cop Tom Graham (Harvey Keitel). Austin had been the mistress of Japanese playboy Eddie Sakamura (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa), and a video from the Nakamoto security cameras shows Sakamura strangling Austin to death. Smith and Graham try to arrest Sakamura, but he appears to die in a car crash.

However, Connor suspects that the video from the security cameras has been tampered with. With the help of half-black, half-Japanese video expert Jingo Asakuma (Tia Carrere), Connor and Smith gradually piece the mystery together: On the night of her death, Austin had sex with Senator Morton in the Nakamoto board room, and near-strangulation was part of their sex play. After Morton left her unconscious, an unidentified man strangled Austin to death. Led to believe that he killed her, Morton was blackmailed into reversing his opposition to Nakamoto's buyout of the defense contractor. So, it's clear that Austin was murdered to further Nakamoto's business interests. Now, Sakamura, who did not die, reappears and gives Connor and Smith a videodisc showing the unidentified man killing Austin. But some Japanese thugs close in and kill Sakamura. Despite being pressured by their superiors to drop the case (insinuating that Nakamoto has some influence over the L.A.P.D.), Connor and Smith show the videodisc to the Nakamoto board, and a nervous Richmond runs from the room. But he's captured and killed by Sakamura's Japanese gangster friends. Later, Jingo (who turns out to be Connor's lover) tells Smith that Richmond might have just been taking the rap for someone higher up.

In turning *Rising Sun* into a movie, Kaufman complicated the racial issues. He shrewdly changed the book's white policeman narrator to a black cop and cast the role with African American star Snipes. The casting of boxoffice draw Sean

Connery as Connor (whom Crichton intentionally patterned after the Scottish movie star) ensured that the film would reach a large audience. The character's (supposedly) deep understanding of Japanese culture was designed to foil the bigoted racial slurs of the detective played by Keitel.

Kaufman made a nod towards his Asian American viewers by changing the character of Eddie Sakamura from the novel's self-centered nerd to a virile playboy, who, in a fatal martial-arts brawl with some henchmen, sacrifices his life to save the heroes. The role of Sakamura was cast with Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, a Japanese American actor who brought a brawny, charismatic presence to the part. The movie muddied the racial waters even more by changing the murderer from a Japanese junior executive to Richmond, the white lawyer. However, in an apparent concession to Crichton's readers, the film's ambiguous ending also suggests that Richmond may not have been the killer after all.

Despite these changes, M.A.N.A.A. and other Asian American organizations, such as the Japanese American Citizens' League (J.A.C.L.) and the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, were outraged by the film. They feared that its nefarious depiction of one Asian group could help spread resentment against all Asians, including Asian Americans. When *RISING SUN* opened on July 30, 1993, M.A.N.A.A. met the L.A. premiere with a picket line. It was the first nationwide protest by Asian Americans against a Hollywood film since the demonstrations against Michael Cimino's *YEAR OF THE DRAGON* back in 1985.

But M.A.N.A.A.'s march against *RISING SUN* drew criticism from Hollywood, from the press, and even from within the Asian American community. So, I spoke with Guy Aoki to address the issues raised by the protest.

What were some of M.A.N.A.A.'s activities before the RISING SUN controversy?

AOKI: One of our concerns was an episode of *NIGHTLINE*. Ted Koppel did a program about the [1992 Los Angeles] riots the week after they took place, and he only interviewed African American leaders. One of the issues he asked about was the conflict with Korean merchants, and all the leaders said detrimental things about Koreans. The show didn't ask any Korean Americans for any response. So, we wrote a letter to *NIGHTLINE* saying that the episode was not responsible journalism.

How did M.A.N.A.A. first become involved in RISING SUN?

Before the movie was made, the J.A.C.L. was already worried that it would have a negative impact on the Japanese American community. They met with Twentieth Century Fox on July 9, 1992. Ron Wakabayashi, who was head of the L.A. Human Relations Commission at that time, knew of my interest in media issues and asked if I wanted to join them for his next meeting with Fox. At the first meeting, Fox agreed to have ongoing dialogues with Ron and Dennis Hayashi of J.A.C.L., and they could bring other people into the meetings. So, they put my name down for the next meeting, which was supposed to be August 10. But the day before that, Fox sent a fax saying that I wasn't supposed to be at the meeting, because I was a working journalist, and they wanted the meetings to be secret.

Ron and Dennis insisted that I be in the meeting. But Fox said no. They went ahead and met with Strauss Zelnick [then President of Fox] and Peter Kaufman [son of director Philip Kaufman and producer of *RISING SUN*]. The meeting was almost like a shouting match. Ron and Dennis were ready to walk out, but they ended up agreeing not to go to the press, as long as they felt that they were getting something mutually beneficial out of their talks with the studio.

Because of that, I was able to set up my own meeting with Fox for September 18 [1992]. They cancelled it that same morning and postponed it to October 8. You can see how much of a delay that was. So, on October 8, I finally met with Fox. By that point, I had a script, and I shared it with J.A.C.L.. Fox had been telling them that the movie wouldn't be the same thing as the book. They said they'd taken out the politics, and it was just going to be a murder mystery.

But I had the script, and I said, "I'm sorry, I don't see much of a difference. You took out the longwinded diatribes against the Japanese for practical purposes: you can't have an interesting film if every character you meet, like in the book, goes on for two pages about what they think of the Japanese. That would be a very boring film. But otherwise, the flavor of the book is intact: this is a very one-sided, paranoid thriller, saying that the Japanese are taking over the U.S. What's more, this is taking place in America. The Japanese are *here*; they're in Los Angeles, and they're using their economic influence to buy off Senators and other powerful people."

"[*RISING SUN*] is about Japanese corporations. It's not about Japanese American 'yuppies.'" — Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

It's true that *RISING SUN* is about the Japanese and not Asian Americans. But what film has been about Asian Americans? Until very recently, none![2] And what movies about Asians have had an effect on Asian Americans? All of them! Whenever Asian faces are on the screen, we're always speaking with [foreign] accents; we're always immigrants from foreign countries. What's missing is showing Asian faces that are in the mainstream of America.

We were looking at *RISING SUN* from an Asian *American* point of view, not a Japanese-national point of view. So, we weren't faulting *RISING SUN* for being negative about Japanese nationals. We were concerned that the film's portrayal of the Japanese would play into all the evil stereotypes that had gone before and that this could have negative consequences for Americans who just happened to be Asian by descent.

There's precedent for this. Back in 1942, 120,000 Japanese Americans knew they were Americans at heart. They had nothing to do with bombing Pearl Harbor, but they were thrown into internment camps anyway. That self-knowledge of national identity didn't help them then, and to a large extent, I don't believe it helps us [Japanese Americans] enough today. I can be a fourth-generation American, yet some people see me and think I know how to speak Japanese just because of my appearance. It doesn't help if *you* know you're an American and not a Japanese citizen; it's how non-Asians *perceive* you that matters. And since not everyone has meaningful contact with Asian Americans, those perceptions are usually based on the impressions they get from the media.

Japanese Americans cannot win. If Japan does something negative, we take the fallout from it. When the Japanese do well economically, [other U.S. citizens] look at Japanese Americans as if we're somehow benefiting from this. But we cut our ties to Japan when our grandparents or great grandparents left in the early part of the century. Just because we look Japanese doesn't mean that we associate with Japan or agree with everything it does.

But even if we don't agree, we're closer, and it's easier for other Americans to take out their anger on *us*. As one of M.A.N.A.A.'s board members once said: If someone gets pissed off at something that's going on in Japan, they're not going to jump on a plane and fly to Japan and kick somebody; they'll kick somebody around here who looks Japanese. For instance, when the Japanese Prime Minister made those [derogatory] remarks about blacks and Puerto Ricans,[3] somebody went to a Japanese American cemetery in East Los Angeles and kicked over some headstones.

"To the claim that [the novel] *Rising Sun* is racist, I refer you to the facts: the [diverse] cast of characters...; the absence of blam[ing Japan]...; the distribution of villains which are overwhelmingly America[n] ...; and to the precise unfolding of the plot. The book is certainly critical. But it is not racist." — Michael Crichton[4]

"Abruptly, [a white prostitute] began to speak. 'And to [the Japanese],' she said, 'their wishes, their desires, it's just as natural as leaving the tip...A lot of them, they are so polite, so correct, but then they get turned on, they have this..this way...' She broke off, shaking her head. 'They're strange people.'" — Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun*[5]

"Is it so difficult to see what's going on here? The Japanese 'way' is clearly at one with the sexual prowess supposedly possessed by blacks and the purported desire of Jews for the blood of Gentile children, the better to perform their ritual sacrifices believed to be the key to their vast economic power. There's a simple word for such sweeping cultural characterizations: racism." — David Ehrenstein[6]

Crichton says that he intended his novel to be a "wakeup call" to U.S. industry, that he's more critical of the United States than Japan. What's wrong with that?

If that was his intention, he failed miserably. If he was really trying to criticize the United States, the characters in the book could have made long diatribes against this country for what we're doing economically. What you had instead was every character going on for pages about how unfair Japanese business practices are. It put the blame entirely on the Japanese. I'm not trying to defend Japan, of course. I don't even understand enough about the trade stuff to go on a talk show and dissect it. But the book was a very one-sided view of what the Japanese are doing, saying that there's reason to not trust them and not like them. If he really wanted to write a "wakeup call" for us, Crichton could have planted more constructive ideas in that book about how we could go about changing our economy, as opposed to just blaming the Japanese.

Crichton claims that "political correctness" and charges of "Japan-bashing" and

racism are merely instruments to prevent a discussion of Japan 's negative effect on the U. S. economy.[7] How do you respond?

M.A.N.A.A. was concerned about how one-sided the story was, and how it was going to encourage resentment against people who are Japanese or look Japanese. We weren't focusing on the unfairness of Japan's business relationship with the U.S.. If you want to write a book specifically about that, I think that's fine. That's probably a valid viewpoint.

But Crichton put these issues in the context of a murder mystery, where a white woman, this all-American blonde from the Midwest, is strangled to death by a Japanese businessman. And the story is about how the Japanese use their supposed influence and predatory technological power to cover up the murder. Given the lack of balanced Asian images in the media, if you combine the murder with this notion that the Japanese are being unfair in business, it's bound to engender resentment against all Asian people. It was mixing those two elements together that was the problem. That's why Philip Kaufman changed the murderer [in the film] to a white man, because he thought an Asian murderer was a little bit too touchy. So, he realized that, too.

During the entire RISING SUN campaign, I never used the term "Japan-bashing," because it has the connotation that you can't criticize Japan. And that shuts down discussion. It's like when you say something is "racist," it's such a big word that you have to explain what you mean. So, don't say a movie is racist; say what's racist *about* it. Break it down so that people can conceive of what you're talking about more directly.

As far as this "political correctness" thing is concerned, M.A.N.A.A. is trying to sensitize people to what the mainstream just doesn't get yet. And people who use [the term] "political correctness" [against us] are basically people who want to defend doing things the same old way, coming from a white point of view that doesn't require them to learn anything beyond their limited orientation. So, for Crichton and the others to wave "political correctness" in our face is really insensitive, and I think it's an insult. They don't care to know how the communities they depict feel about these things. I wish we had a word that was the antithesis of "political correctness," so we could wave that in *their* face as freely as they wave "political correctness" in ours.

Why did you break your agreement with Fox not to talk to the media?

In the fall of 1992, we were still under agreement with Fox not to go public about our apprehensions. So, we waited until the following January, because that's when we heard that trailers [a.k.a. previews of coming attractions] were running in theatres. So, we said that we'd like to get a copy of the RISING SUN trailer. But Zelnick didn't want to put the trailers on videocassette; he'd only give us passes into the theatres. One of our board members was escorted into a theatre by the ushers to see this short trailer and then escorted out before the main feature began. She felt very insulted by the experience.

On January 22 [1993], I wrote a letter to Zelnick, and I said, "We'd like to know when the movie's coming out, and we'd like to see a pre-screening of it." We thought it was a reasonable request. But he wrote back, saying there was no release

date, even when, at that point, it was known that the film would be released in July. So, I believe he lied to us. And he denied us a screening.

So, we at M.A.N.A.A. asked ourselves:

"Why are we keeping quiet about this? Since we're going to have to see this movie at the same time the general public does, why are we keeping quiet when we know so much about this film already? We already have a script. We already know what's going to happen with this film. What are we getting out of our agreement to stay quiet? Nothing!"

Why did you want an advance screening?

So we knew what we might be fighting.

Not for the purpose of making changes to the film?

Ideally, that's what we were hoping for. We wanted to have some kind of input, some kind of dialogue with the studio on seeing if we could soften it at all. If Fox had agreed to show us a prescreening of *RISING SUN*, we obviously would have given them input as far as what [changes] we'd like to see. You know, you can see something in the script, but you don't exactly know how it's going to look on the screen. There is something that could be softened or magnified in the translation. So, for our own peace of mind, it would help us to see the film before its release. But any changes would be up to Fox. They could take our suggestions or leave them. In the end, if the film was negative to Asians — with or without changes — we would still speak out against it.

But we didn't think this movie could be saved. I passed the script around to different people in M.A.N.A.A., and they all agreed that just taking out a few scenes here and there couldn't change the overall anti-Asian tone. So, it would be more helpful for us to see the finished film and know exactly what we were fighting.

After Zelnick turned down our request, we went to the Media Image Coalition, an umbrella organization of different groups concerned about their images in the media, and we brought them and other community groups aboard our protest. And we sent Zelnick a list of demands:

First, we wanted a disclaimer put at the beginning of the film saying that the movie isn't meant to encourage resentment against anybody of Asian descent, and to recognize that hate crimes are a very important concern in this country. Secondly, when they make films featuring Asians in the future, we wanted Fox to have an Asian American consultant, someone who understands Asian issues from a community point of view. *RISING SUN* had Steve Clemons, who is white, from the Japan-America Society as its advisor on Japanese issues, but he didn't understand how these issues affect the Japanese American community. Our third demand was for Fox to hire more Asian Americans in decision-making roles at the studios, so that when a film like *RISING SUN* comes up for development, someone would be there to say, "Now, wait, we could have problems with this. Let's look at how we can do this without stepping on people's toes." We had 16 organizations sign on to our statement. We gave Zelnick the letter in March and gave him two weeks to get back to us.

Two weeks went by, and we got this letter from him saying that they always try to hire Asian Americans. He didn't feel the need to hire an Asian American consultant — he thought a white consultant was fine — and he wasn't going to put a disclaimer at the beginning of the movie because it's "self-evidently" a work of fiction. So, I got on the phone with Zelnick for the first time, 'cos I never talked to the guy before, to request an advance screening. He said, "Why the hell should I show you the picture?" And here's a direct quote:

"It's just going to give you more ammunition for your protests! What's in it for me? What's in it for me?"

I said, "Well, if this film is as harmless as you think it is, why wouldn't you show it to us?" But that didn't get me anywhere. Finally, I said,

"You do what you have to do, and I'll do what I have to do. We feel we've been very reasonable about this, and you guys haven't shown us anything in return for our being quiet. So, we're going to take this to the public and let them decide."

Is that when you started your media campaign?

Yes, that was March 31. We began by talking to the *L.A. Times*.^[8] I also started the "RISING SUN Watch" in my *Rafu Shimpo* column, and M.A.N.A.A. let the public know how concerned we were about the movie. We said that we were still going to try to see a pre-screening somehow — sneak in, whatever — and we're going to see the film before any protest, 'cos we want to be responsible. But we said that if the film is as bad as we think it will be, we're going to protest. And we were already lining up people across the country to support us. We got on C.N.N. and E! [Entertainment Television] and other channels.

The campaign was successful because we defined the film. When RISING SUN had its press junket up in New York, Fox flew all the journalists up there and put them up in hotels to talk with these big stars. In all the interviews I saw on T.V., all the comments the stars made were in answer to our accusations. They didn't get a chance to talk about the usual things, like, "Oh, that Sean Connery, he's such a practical joker! Let me tell you what he did the first day on the set..." They weren't able to talk about that lightweight stuff; they had to spend all their time defending the film. So, I think we won the public relations battle: even though Fox spent millions to publicize RISING SUN and we didn't have a budget, we controlled the spin on the film.

"[M.A.N.A.A.] made demands on the studio to stop the film from being made...If I was Fox, I would find no other reason to talk to you if you were telling me you don't want me to do my business. And the fact that talks continued afterwards, you got to give them (Twentieth Century Fox) a little credit that they were still talking." — Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa^[9]

"[M.A.N.A.A.'s] charges are upsetting, demeaning and insulting to the many Japanese Americans who worked in many capacities on the film and whose voices are not being heard...Restricting or trying to impose bans on films like RISING SUN seems to go against the main principles

of Guy Aoki...and some of the Asian Pacific community leaders since it contributes to limiting rather than expanding the way in which all races are perceived. The idea of pre-censorship by special interest groups is not something we can support." — Andrea Jaffe, President of Domestic Marketing, Twentieth Century Fox[10]

How do you respond to these statements?

Cary wasn't in my meeting with Fox, so what he heard was second-hand. And we never told Fox that they couldn't make *RISING SUN*. We said to them from the very beginning that we understood their rights as filmmakers to their own creative visions. We were just giving them feedback. We have a right to our opinion, too, and we were exercising our First Amendment rights by telling Fox, at a crucial point in their moviemaking, that we had a problem with their film because of the potential volatility of the material. If we did feel they shouldn't make this film, we could have done more drastic things: we could have disrupted shooting; we could have done crazy stuff. We didn't do that.

As for Andrea, she was grasping at straws. She said that the protest was a slap in the face to the many Asian American actors and talents that they hired. And my response to that was, "If you guys support Asian American talent so much, why don't you use them in your movies where they're not speaking with accents, not always economic predators? Why don't you put them in mainstream roles? You can support them that way."

M.A.N.A.A. never criticizes any Asian American actor for taking any role in any film or television show that we don't like. We know the reality is that they're only offered roles that are bad or not-so-bad. What kind of a choice is that? That's why we target the people who have the power of giving them these roles: the writers, the producers, directors, and the studio heads who reflect their own ignorance of Asians and Asian Americans. So, Andrea gave a typical line that she would give to anybody about censorship, when, in fact, we were not censoring.

Were you able to see the film in advance?

Yes, we saw it the Monday night before it opened. There was a sneak preview in L.A. that night, and the leaders of just about every concerned group were there. M.A.N.A.A. got them passes, and we all saw it.

Were you impressed by any of the changes Philip Kaufman made to the story?

If anything, Kaufman made it worse. He made the ending more ambiguous, so you didn't know if the murderer was really white. He put in this epilogue, saying that the white "murderer" could have just been taking the fall for the Japanese. So, he added this air of uncertainty: Did they really catch the killer, or did the Japanese get away with murder? But everything else we had trouble with was already there in the January '92 draft of the script.

You objected most strongly to the racial epithets — "Jap" and "Nip" — used repeatedly in the film by the Harvey Keitel character. But others, even some Japanese Americans, didn't see the film as advocating his racist point of view.

By making the Harvey Keitel character this Archie Bunker/ loveable-bigot kind of guy...

What do you mean by that?

A guy who's prejudiced but who's funny. That makes it easier to accept the racist stuff he says. For instance, when Cary Tagawa is making out with these two white women, Keitel's character says, "[The Japanese] are plundering our natural resources," and the line gets a laugh. When you laugh at something like that, you take it in; you accept it. So, it made the bigoted stuff he was saying more palatable.

Others have seen the Sean Connery character as a positive blend of Western and Japanese cultures.

How is he a blend of Western and Japanese cultures? He speaks Japanese terribly. He never defends the Japanese at all. Sure, he says to Keitel, "Nobody forced us to [sell our companies to the Japanese]." But if this guy is such a Japanophile, why is it that he stands by when Harvey Keitel [his character] makes these rude remarks about the Japanese? Why doesn't he say something like, "Hey, I'm getting a little fed up with this 'Jap' and 'Nip' stuff. Take it someplace else, pal." But he just goes along with it. One of our major contentions with Fox was that all of these racial slurs weren't being challenged. Can you imagine a Hollywood movie where a white guy hurls around racial epithets about blacks and gets away with it? I can't.

"Do you know what signal that sends out to the Black community when some Asians say you shouldn't have put a Black actor into the movie? This is a terrible kind of thing to say because they are struggling to have Black actors work in crossover roles, and Wesley Snipes has the biggest role of his career opposite Sean Connery." — Philip Kaufman[11]

Obviously, M.A.N.A.A. encourages the studios to do nontraditional casting, where blacks, Asians, and Latinos play "white" roles that could really be played by actors of any race. We're just saying, when you place a black person into the context of this film, where there's resentment against the Japanese, it adds to the racial volatility. After what the Japanese Prime Minister said about black people, there was already resentment against the Japanese in the black community. So, when you add Wesley Snipes to the mix of people being done in by the Japanese, that stirs up the resentment even more.

"Responding to calls for more positive role models, such as Japanese American characters who are lawyers and doctors, [producer] Peter Kaufman said, 'If you want to just have these sanitized [characters], no one will go see that because it's boring.'" — *Rafu Shimpo*[12]

Beautiful. Peter's promising us more of the same: "exciting" stereotypes. Showing Asians as part of mainstream America isn't "sanitizing"; it's true-to-life. Most Asian American actors don't speak with accents, and yet, they're almost always forced by Hollywood to play accented roles. *RISING SUN* could have had some balance by having a Japanese American cop help the detectives.

What about the coroner, played by Amerasian actress Amy Hill?

That part was fine for multi-ethnic casting. But the character came and went so fast, she didn't really help the audience tell the difference between the Japanese and Japanese Americans.

Some of RISING SUN's defenders say the film presented a good balance of Asian characters.

Among the Japanese businessmen? None of them took a stand against the Japanese company, except for Cary's character. He was the only one who was an atypical Japanese character, and in true GUNGA DIN fashion, he ended up sacrificing his life for Sean Connery and Wesley Snipes. Tia Carrere's character was merely used as another instrument of hate against the Japanese, saying how racist they are: rejecting her because she's half-black and because she "dared" to fall in love with a white man [Connor]. She basically renounces her Japanese heritage. All the other Japanese characters went along with the company. No one else stood up and said, "Gee, this stinks! I don't want to be a part of this company if it's going to be covering up a murder." No one did that. Everyone was a cog in the wheel — or worse. So, I think it's wishful thinking for anyone to say that RISING SUN had balanced and diverse Japanese characters.

"[My role as] Eddie Sakamura broke a stereotype...I wouldn't want my son to grow up and be this character...But I think it's important for all Asian males that we be portrayed sexually, that we have some sort of attraction...I think [the role] is going to have an overall positive effect.
— Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa[13]

It's true that Cary's character was positive: he was playing a playboy, so he was socially accepted on one level. And he was seen romancing white women, so you could call that a breakthrough. That would have been fine *in another movie*. This was a film where his being a playboy and his romancing white women were used against him, as being more examples of how the Japanese are corrupting America, especially white women. I hope Cary's role in RISING SUN is good for his career, 'cos I think he should be playing more leading male characters. Taken by itself, the role was positive. But within the context of RISING SUN, his role didn't help the film.

"I liked [RISING SUN]. I could see the care Kaufman took to treat the Japanese with respect. Asian Americans who want the sanctity of sainthood wouldn't like it because the Japanese are portrayed as multi-faceted humans with ambitions, desires and weaknesses...If we [Asian Americans] want fairness in the media, we must be fair ourselves. If we keep sniping at movies that take such pains to portray us fairly, we will ultimately be the losers. Let's act on our gut rather than our political reflexes." — Tom Kagy, editor, *Transpacific* magazine[14]

I was surprised by Tom Kagy. While some Asians were relieved that the film wasn't as bad as they thought it would be, Tom is the only Asian American I know who actually liked RISING SUN. Tom shares my concern for how Asian males are portrayed in the media: asexual and sinister and so on. I know this because I was the music editor for *AsiAm* [later *Transpacific*] for its first three months of publication in 1986, and we talked about these things, and we agreed. I think what happened here is that Tom focused on Cary's character as being so positive that he

was willing to overlook everything else. And we at M.A.N.A.A. weren't willing to overlook everything else.

How did M.A.N.A.A. 's protest against RISING SUN come together?

All the community leaders met after the screening Monday night, and we all discussed the film. In the end, we all agreed: we should go ahead with the protest. So, I feel we made a responsible decision. Obviously, you can't wait until the Monday night before the movie opens to say, "If it's bad, then we're going to rally the troops." We had to start rallying the troops early on, just in case.

Even though M.A.N.A.A. is an all-volunteer organization, we managed to rally concerned people across the country. We began fielding phone calls from every major T.V. station in L.A., as well as the newspapers and radio stations. We even got calls from the British and Japanese press. J.A.C.L. organized protests in New York and San Francisco, and some *ad hoc* groups formed to protest the film in Chicago, Seattle, even in Minneapolis. We were in touch with all these groups.

RISING SUN opened on Friday, July 30. That morning, we held a press conference at the [Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in L.A.'s Little Tokyo]. It was like a dream come true! Over the last few months, M.A.N.A.A. members, like Philip Chung and Joyce Mitamura, had formed alliances with many non-Asian groups, and many of them were there to back me up at the press conference. They included Nosotros, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. Of course, N.C.R.R. and J.A.C.L. were there, too. We didn't call for a boycott of the film, but we did announce that we would be picketing the theatre showing RISING SUN in Westwood [an L.A. suburb] and distributing educational literature.

We found out two days earlier that Fox had changed the theatre showing the film in Westwood. But it was a good change, because the new theatre gave us more room for our picket line. We passed out questionnaires asking the audience if they thought words like "Jap" and "Nip" were acceptable and if they ever saw an Asian male portrayed romantically in the movies. There are so few [Hollywood] films with Asian male romantic leads that nobody could think of any. By the end of our two-day protest, about 140 people had joined our picket line. We didn't try to stop anyone from seeing RISING SUN. We just wanted to educate the audience, and if they still wanted to see the movie, that was fine: they could make up their own minds. I feel very good that we took the high road in protesting RISING SUN.

And thanks to all our work, the press showed up. Most of the local news coverage focused on the Westwood protest, but ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT showed the New York and San Francisco rallies as well. It did a good job in capturing the solidarity of our demonstration and in spreading our concerns across the country. Then, there was the local station that referred to us as "Japanese" [rather than as Asian Americans]. There's one in every crowd. But in the end, I think we got our message across.

You protested the film because you were worried that it might provoke anti-Asian violence. Can you mention any hate crimes that were directly provoked by the film?

No.

Then, couldn't it be said that you blew the issue out of proportion?

Before RISING SUN, you had all these newscast and print stories about the Japanese taking over American industry.[15] Now, you had a movie, the first big Hollywood movie, that showed it on the screen and gave these stories validity. We felt that if people were constantly inundated with stories about how unfair the Japanese are, this would just increase resentment in the back of people's minds. I'm not necessarily saying that, as soon as someone sees RISING SUN and gets something to eat, they're going to go out and kick an Asian. But resentment doesn't have to act itself out immediately; it can do so somewhere down the road, because it becomes a part of people's subconscious. So, the fact that I can't point to someone being accosted because of the film doesn't poke holes in our argument.

Doesn't the arrival of Asian American-themed films like DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY and THE JOY LUCK CLUB, and T. V. shows like VANISHING SON and ALL-AMERICAN GIRL, say that you're assigning too much importance to just one movie?

No, it's going to take a lot more than just a couple of movies and a couple of shows. What I find is that we Asian Americans are still looked upon as foreigners. Except for ALL-AMERICAN GIRL, all those other projects are pretty much based upon Asians in foreign countries or immigrants who are still being assimilated. Granted, there were the daughters in THE JOY LUCK CLUB, but most of that movie was about people from China. We still don't see Asians being shown as [characters] who don't have accents, who are just doctors, just lawyers, marriage counselors, whatever. To offset this perception of Asian "foreignness," you have to show Asian Americans as very mainstream. So, I think these other projects are nice, but I still haven't seen the breakthrough. No, we can't say, "Things are getting better now, so movies like RISING SUN are okay."

Do you think the protest had an impact on Hollywood?

I think it did in the sense that it showed we have to be taken seriously, because I heard that the reason why Fox set up and cancelled our meetings is because they thought, if they just put us off, we'd eventually go away.

Also, the impact we made was demonstrated two weeks after RISING SUN came out, when the *L.A. Times* did a poll about how Asians are covered in the media. Their poll asked how much T.V. news coverage of Asians is positive, negative, or fair. And only 17% said it was negative. But when they got to how Asians are portrayed in film, 72% said "distorted." So, how can there be that much of a disparity between how we're covered in news and our images in the movies? I think it's because of the protest.

We're now trying to have a more proactive impact on Hollywood: we're meeting directly with studios like Warner Brothers and Tri-Star. That way, we can infuse them with a sensitivity that will be understood from the top down. So, hopefully, we won't always have to be reacting to films after they come out.

After meeting with Warner Brothers about FALLING DOWN, which had that

mean-spirited scene with the Korean grocer, they produced a public service video to make up for the racial divisiveness of the film. The video was sent around to movie theatres to show before the feature film. And they agreed to listen to our concerns about their filmmaking projects in the future.

We're also part of this new Commission on Fairness in the Media that Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition has started. And we're still part of the Media Image Coalition. So, there's a movement out there pushing for more balanced images in the media. And M.A.N.A.A.'s a part of that. We're shaking things up.

NOTES

A Note on Terminology

While some object to using the term "American" exclusively to describe the people of the United States—preferring "U.S. citizen" instead, "Asian American" presents a special case.

Until the end of World War II, racist laws in the United States prevented most Asian immigrants from becoming citizens. In reaction to this, most Asian American communities count the immigrant generation as the first "American" generation. Consequently, many Asian immigrants, both living and dead, are considered as "Americans" even though they were never naturalized as citizens. Therefore, in this article, the term "American," though limited to the United States, isn't always synonymous with "U.S. citizen."

Special thanks to the *Rafu Shimpo* for the use of its news photos and to H.D. for her invaluable archival work.

1. Quoted in Glenn Suravech, "RISING SUN Actor Speaks His Mind," *Rafu Shimpo*, July 29, 1993, p.1.

2. Aoki's statement isn't entirely accurate. To the contrary, Hollywood has been known to make films about Asian Americans. For example, Robert Florey's *DAUGHTER OF SHANGHAI* (Paramount, 1937), starring Anna May Wong, and Henry Koster's *FLOWER DRUM SONG* (Universal, 1961), based on Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway musical, featured Asian American protagonists. However, the exceptions are so few, they hardly qualify Aoki's point.

3. On September 23, 1986, then-Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone was quoted as saying: "...In the United States, because there are a considerable number of blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans, the [intellectual] level is lower." The remark provoked such anger from the U.S. Congress that Nakasone was compelled to issue a formal apology on September 26. See "Nakasone Offends U.S. Minorities," *Facts on File*, 46, no. 2393, October 3, 1986, p. 737.

4. Michael Crichton, "America Bound and Gagged: 'Political Correctness' and Censorship of the U.S.-Japan Relationship," *World Affairs Journal: A Compendium* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles World Affairs Council, 1993), p. 49.

5. Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 64.

6. David Ehrenstein, "War Business," *Sight and Sound*, 3, No. 10 (October 1993), p. 12.
7. Crichton, "America Bound and Gagged," pp. 53-54.
8. Jane Galbraith, "Group Takes RISING SUN Protest Public," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1993, p. F-I.
9. Quoted in Suravech, "RISING SUN Actor," p. 1.
10. Quoted in "Studio Responds to Objections," *Hokubei Mainichi* (San Francisco), August 3, 1993, p. 1.
11. Quoted in J.K. Yamamoto, "Eye of the Storm," *Rafu Shimpo*, August 14, 1993, p. 1.
12. Ibid.
13. Quoted in J.K. Yamamoto, "Tagawa Stresses Positive Aspects of SUN Role," *Hokubei Mainichi*, September 9, 1993, p. 1.
14. T. Kagy, "Between the Lines," *Transpacific* (September 1993), p. 94.
15. Several news reports have likened Japan's business acquisitions to the country's military invasions during World War II. See Jon Funabiki, "'Asian Invasion' Clichés Recall Wartime Propaganda," *Extra!*, 5, no. 5 (July-August 1992), pp. 13-14.

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Finding Christa. In Search of Our Fathers Black autobiographical documentary

by Jim Lane

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"The diary film draws upon the pure lyric, and often becomes indistinguishable from it. It arises out of the filmmaker's self-consciousness about the temporality of filming and editing. It explores that temporality as if it were the time of living. Often it suppresses the compounding of editing or sound in order to press home the equation. However, it is the autobiographical cinema per se that confronts fully the rupture between the time of cinema and the time of experience and invents forms to contain what it finds there." — P. Adam Sitney[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

"In the conjunction of history and autobiography we encounter once more the fundamental paradox of a referential art: the simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the constraints of the real." — Paul John Eakin[2]

In this essay, I will address the approach to subjectivity, temporality, and narrative in two African American, autobiographical documentaries: Marco Williams' *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* (1992) and Camille Billops and James Hatch's *FINDING CHRISTA* (1991). In this analysis, I will concentrate on how the representation of time influences subjectivity and claims to African American history in autobiographical documentary. I wish to place these films within the larger movement of autobiographical documentary in the United States and discuss how these filmmakers overcome the potential ideological constraints of chronological narrative and assert African American history through autobiographical strategies.

Since 1968, many filmmakers have explored autobiographical representation through documentary film and video.[3] These film and video makers have turned their cameras and tape recorders on themselves, their families, and their immediate world. A movement of autobiographical documentary has followed that has rejected the myth of the objective camera of U.S. direct-cinema and endorsed a politics of experience. The majority of these documentarists have produced their films in the United States, where the most complex development of the autobiographical documentary has occurred.[4] African American filmmakers have been conspicuously absent from this documentary movement. Recently, however,

the release of Marco Williams' *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* and Camille Billops and James Hatch's *FINDING CHRISTA* have offered an opportunity to examine the convergence of autobiography, documentary, and African American culture.[5]

Marco Williams shot *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* over a ten year period beginning in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1981 and concluding in Los Angeles, California in 1991. The film contains dual projects that form the two narrative threads interwoven throughout the film. One project depicts Williams' journey to find and meet with his father, James Berry, whom Williams does not know. This search involves several emotional conversations with his mother, Winnie, in Paris, Cambridge and Los Angeles and concludes with Williams finally meeting his father in Springfield, Ohio. The other project involves Williams' attempt to draw a portrait of his extended family in Philadelphia. This extended family, comprised of aunts and cousins, has a tradition of absent fathers which troubles Williams, forcing him to examine his own family in the context of an article, to which he refers in the opening of the film, that cites a statistic stating that 47% of black families in the United States have absent fathers. These two projects, therefore, are inextricably bound to each other: Williams' own search for his historically absent father is framed by a broader examination of his extended family to which he has unique access.

IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS cogently suggests an alternative way of viewing the African American matriarchy and the sons and daughters growing up in such a situation. Williams implicitly undercuts the pejorative, status quo views of the single mother, African American family, views initiated by mainstream liberalism of the sixties and cynically transformed by eighties neo-conservatism.[6] We come to see his family organized around a matriarchal structure which does not produce the social problems which mainstream United States so fears. Williams' family is a functioning, working class group which supports itself. It is a family with a history, most succinctly represented through oral testimony, which has created a network of caring and empowered particular family members. This is especially the case for the filmmaker himself and his mother.

FINDING CHRISTA is also a family portrait film, comprised mainly of interviews with the filmmakers' family, friends, and the filmmakers themselves, embedded in the larger pattern of a search. Camille Billops, with the aid of her co-director and husband, James Hatch, initiates this project when her daughter Christa, whom Camille had given up for adoption at age four, endeavors to reunite with her mother after thirty years of anonymity. The film is as much an attempt to represent the present reuniting of daughter and mother as it is an attempt to re-examine the family history and past events which led up to Camille's decision to give up custody of Christa. *FINDING CHRISTA* offers another view of the African American family as seen through the lens of a mother who was criticized for "abandoning" her daughter and pursuing her career in art and a new life with her husband, who is not Christa's father.

FINDING CHRISTA presents a woman looking back on a defining moment in her life, sparked by an unexpected solicitation from her daughter. Through this retrospection, Billops realizes that her choices went against the prevailing opinion of her mother, aunts, and cousins who wished to keep Christa, a child "born out of wedlock," within the family. Through an examination of the attitudes voiced by

family members in the filmed interviews, Billops determines that although her decision was a painful one, it was the right one. She was able to pursue her career in art and find her husband, James Hatch. As Billops states in the film, she realized later that this choice came from a feminist impulse to gain economic and familial independence.

IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS and FINDING CHRISTA present a forceful case for what an African American matriarchy is or can be. The films achieve an implicit re-examination of official history of the African American family through an autobiographical strategy determined to articulate both an immediate personal experience and a broader critique of that experience through social/ historical specificity.

I do not argue that these films are the 'only' or 'proper' approach to the problem of subjectivity, narrative, and temporality. Instead, what I wish to propose in this essay is the political and historical viability of a variety of approaches to chronological narrative in the autobiographical documentary. IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS and FINDING CHRISTA are a fertile testing ground for competing theories of narrative and time. I wish to place these films in the middle of these debates as a way to read the films and to address pertinent theoretical arguments, which will be delineated below.

HISTORY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY/ THEORY

I would like to examine the use of narrative structuring within the autobiographical mode of documentary in the context of IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS and FINDING CHRISTA. Hayden White, states that narrative discourse, especially

"chronological narrative, is an arbitrary imposition on historical events. The emplotment of events into chronological stories does not reflect a real world structure but rather the vicissitudes of narrative discourse, which is linked to ideology and morality. Events are not inherently narrativized. In the name of truth and reference, narrative discourse can muddy truth claims of historical events."

White critiques historians for their use of narrative. He understands the institutional struggle to privilege narrative history as the "discourse of the real." [7]

IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS and FINDING CHRISTA are not written histories like those Hayden White critiques. Nonetheless, the films present a type of history and discourse (audio/visual documentary autobiography-as-history in chronological narrative form) which could be susceptible to many of White's charges. Moreover, there is a convergence of documentary, a representational mode often viewed as a "discourse of the real," and autobiography, a mode similarly viewed as a "discourse of the real." The autobiographical documentary as a genre deepens the question of such films' connection to history and the role that narrative, especially chronological narrative, plays in this connection. [8]

Marco Williams presents himself in his film as a narrator who in voice-over introduces people or topics, responds to what people say in the film, or recounts events not seen by the viewer. The film's chronology is presented through

voiceover, intertitles, such as "Cambridge, Spring 1981," "Harlem, Mid-Summer 1982," "Philadelphia, 1983," "Paris, Christmas 1984," "Philadelphia, Mother's Day 1985," etc., and also through peoples' physical transformations, especially in the case of Marco's mother, Winnie, whose hair turns gray through the years of the filming.

The film also utilizes classic narrative codes. It begins with a question (Who/where is Marco's father?) and delays the answer to end of the film. Moreover, the film presents a narrator/ author/ main character who attempts to shed an uncertain self in favor of a self who can resolve the questions of his own personal history. Williams concludes the film with a passage from E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, which states, "Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer." Indeed, this narrative trajectory seems particularly vulnerable to post-structural and deconstructive critiques, given the film's suggestion there might be a resolution based on a non-fragmentary existence.

Camille Billops and James Hatch utilize a more thematic organization in their film, indicated by inter-titles such as "Why did You Leave Me?" "Christa, Where Were You?" "O.K. Christa, What Now?" and "Almost Home." Unlike the intertitles in Williams' film, these titles serve little narrative function, such as establishing time and place. They do, however, serve to structure the various intercut interviews which recreate events through memory at a micro-narrative level. As the film presents these intercut testimonies, the story that emerges is understood and expressed as a chronology of events. As we will see below, the nagging, painful questions about her mother's identity, voiced at the beginning by Christa, are indeed resolved by the film's completion and by knowledge seen as a resolution to self-doubt. Thus, while it is a fair observation to note that *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* functions much more cleanly as a chronological narrative, *FINDING CHRISTA* also utilizes chronological narrative at the same time it attempts to complicate it. Moreover, both films articulate a progression from fundamental insecurity about the filmmaker's circumstances to a resolution based on knowledge, acceptance, and understanding.[9]

It is difficult to argue against Hayden White about the arbitrariness of plotting and narrating historical events. There is a theoretical possibility that these documentaries' use of chronological narrative might undermine their autobiographical and historical claims. However, I assert that the films' autobiographical claims are not completely overshadowed by the ideological pitfalls of chronological narrative.

These documentaries open a discursive space complicating White's claims. Chronological narrative and micronarratives, as deployed in these films, speak to the filmmakers' personal histories and form the basis of their autobiographical acts. It is the autobiographical act which marks the rupture between Sitney's "time of cinema and time of experience." The films' chronological narrative, therefore, give an indication of specific cinematic choices made in response to questions such as these: How does the filmmaker organize the shot material? How does the filmmaker organize this material in such a way as to represent and interpret the historical events? Representation and interpretation, embedded in the narrative, have here a phenomenological function as well as an autobiographical function.

Post-production choices such as the inclusion of voice over, intertitles, as well as the film's larger narrative structure indicate a system representing past historical events, events consistently interpreted by an autobiographical discursive frame, which speaks from its own unique yet not disconnected historical moment. The structure of the chronological narrative, while clearly imposed on the events, still refers to a structure of experience implicitly referred to in the films. The temporality of the events are in a reciprocal relationship with the structure of the narration of the events.[10]

In the autobiographical documentary film, the profilmic event is always already filtered through discursive systems. The two main systems are visual and aural. The visual is constituted by a camera frame, delimited by the choices available to the cinematographer at the time of filming, including focal length, depth of field, and available light. The aural register includes the dynamic range of the microphone used during the actual shooting and the postproduction sound including voice-over narration and music. *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* and *FINDING CHRISTA* use all of the above. The profilmic events are already contained by the inherent discourses of the technical recording apparatus, and, by the filmmakers' engagement with this technology. The subsequent structuring of these events into chronological narrative form is another layering of discourse onto an already "framed" event. It is, therefore, more productive from a critical standpoint, to look at the choice of chronological narrative and micro-narratives as one of many possibilities available to the film autobiographer who is always already inscribing a discourse and framing the real.

In literary autobiography studies, Paul John Eakin has argued this point in response to Paul DeMan's article, "Autobiography as De-Facement," in which DeMan insists on the impossibility of reference in autobiography because of language's inability to signify anything beyond language itself.[11] Eakin's response to DeMan deserves a more detailed review. Eakin writes:

"The deconstructive challenge to reference in autobiography turns, then, on the relation between the experience of the individual ('the thing itself') and its representation in language ('the picture'). Underlying my defense of narrative and chronology as structures of reference in autobiography is a distinctly different view of the relation between self and language: If our inscription, indeed our circumscription, in language is truly as total and comprehensive as DeMan suggests, the human experience in language ('the picture') becomes virtually coextensive with 'the thing itself,' all of human experience that we may know. In this sense, autobiography may well be consubstantial to a significant degree with the deeply linguistic nature of reality it presumes to incarnate." [12]

In the case of the autobiographical documentary, therefore, the filmmaker is engaged with the film language that actively interprets profilmic events, "the thing itself." Cinematic self-inscription, like literary self-inscription, is always already "the picture." But the picturing does not necessarily exclude the autobiographer from gaining access to and developing a relationship with the thing itself. In fact, autobiographical documentary provides evidence of the autobiographer's opinions, memories, and thoughts in struggle with historical events. This struggle comprises

the very dynamic of the autobiographical act, which always engages in a tension between the presentation and interpretation of personal life events. Presentation and interpretation remain inseparable.

In the case of *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* and *FINDING CHRISTA*, the passage of time becomes centrally important at both the level of history and interpretation, "the thing itself" and "the picture." In the case of *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS*, the film's events cover some ten years. On the surface, the organization of these events seems very simple, especially when compared to the seemingly more complicated structure of *FINDING CHRISTA*.^[13] However, even this seemingly straightforward presentation involves a highly complicated interpretation which is linked to the filmmaker's personal reactions. Williams' film evokes Paul Ricoeur's observation that even "the humblest of narratives is always more than a chronological series of events" ("Narrative Time," p. 174).

In the figures of Marco Williams and Camille Billops, the films present transformations that occur through time because of certain sequential events that take place in the filmmakers' personal histories. This sequence of events is reconstructed by the films' narratives and testimonies. The narrative structure is, therefore, true to the past. Echoing Eakin's comments on chronological autobiographical narrative, each film "is justified by its roots in the experience" (*Touching the World*, p. 197). However, these narrative structures go far beyond a simple attempt to represent personal history as made up of uncomplicated events that can easily be filmed and edited to create a seamless mimesis of the events and their time relations. Reference to specific moments in these documentaries will bear out my observations.

THE FILMS THEMSELVES

The opening sequence of *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* shows Marco Williams in Cambridge, Massachusetts 1981 sitting, phone in hand, as he and the audience listen to the sound of a phone ringing through the receiver.^[14] In voice-over, Williams states,

"I was twenty-four years old the first time I ever learned my father's name. Six months before this call, we'd spoken briefly. 'Do you consider yourself a man,' he said. 'If you do, we can meet and we can see.'"

There was no meeting. The ensuing phone conversation depicts Williams attempting to schedule a time that he and his father, James Berry, might meet. In the course of the conversation, Williams mentions the idea of filming this meeting. Berry resists, saying, 'I don't think it's the proper thing to do.' When Williams says he doesn't understand, Berry responds, 'They'll probably be a lot of things you don't understand in your young life.'"

The opening sequence initiates many of the problems which the film will play out, especially Berry's continued resistance to seeing the filmmaker. The resistance emerges not only in Berry's refusal to see Williams but also in Berry's challenge to the filmmaker's man/adulthood ("Do you consider yourself a *man*?") as well as Berry's rejection of the film idea ("They'll probably be lots of things you don't understand in your *young* life.") Berry implies that Williams is not mature enough to meet him on the father's terms. The resistance is marked further into the film

when Williams, many years later, pursues his father while in Columbus, Ohio. His father once again staves off a meeting by refusing to accept the filmmaker's calls and refusing to return his messages.

The opening sequence also initiates a self-conscious critique of the filmmaking process and the degree to which the camera's presence influences the filmmaker's ability to make sense of his inquiry. The film accepts the difficulties of filming the world in an autobiographical fashion and acknowledges the limits of such a project as well as the hindering nature of the filming apparatus.[15] However, the filmmaker's persistence testifies to the viability of such a project despite certain obstacles born out of people's resistance in the film.

Moreover, the voice-over narration complicates the category of time and implicitly critiques the film image's ability to represent fully the events germane to Williams' pursuit. Specifically, the opening voice-over refers to a time six months prior to the events depicted on the screen, exposing the limited status of the image and opening up a complicated relation between narration and image. This is one of many examples which extend the film beyond simple chronological narrative. Time's potential intractability is further underscored by the film's systematic use of black frames that appear between cuts. These mark moments of postproduction decisions, which offer later interpretations of depicted events.

Some fifty minutes into the film and many years later, we finally see James Berry. As the meeting sequence opens, we see Berry nervously sitting on a couch in his Springfield, Ohio business office. Williams, behind the camera, states in voice over, "I could sense this wasn't going to be easy." Further into the scene, Berry states, "How do I know, Marco, that I'm your dad?" and firmly asserts that there is "...no reason for a woman to get pregnant, even in the fifties. I do not accept it and will not." As the meeting scene concludes, Marco states in voiceover, "This was my father? He wasn't at all what I had expected. It caused a pang in my heart."

This sequence shows no change in Berry. No grand reunion, as perhaps fantasized the filmmaker had fantasized, indicated by his observation that Berry wasn't what he expected. Berry's denial of responsibility extends to both Williams and the filmmaker's mother as Berry voices his disbelief that a woman might become pregnant "even in the fifties," reaffirming the father's years-long rejection, a fact referred to throughout the film. What is unique in this sequence is that the father is now represented through the image: he is *seen*.

This sequence also indicates the difference between film time and that of experience, made explicit in the commentary, which speaks in the past tense. Williams' spoken phrase, "pang in his heart," over the image of the father provides a clear example of this difference, placing a posterior commentary over an image of the past. The image becomes something contained within a larger observation — something beyond the chronological representation of events, yet founded on such a structure.

These concluding realizations, stated in voice over, emerge through Williams' personal transformation as it is represented in the film. His understandings revolve around a range of desires, including finding his father, not letting the father "off the hook" as he feels the women in his family have, and confronting his mother about the past. His mother's initial recalcitrance and outright hostility toward her

son's wish to find his father serves to fuel the filmmaker's resolve to do just that. Moreover, Winnie's objections and Williams' persistence form an additional nexus for conflict which is worked out by the narrative. This working out on the part of the narrative is as much to do with the filmmaker's historical observations, however, as it does with the ideological constraints of narrative itself.

When Williams finally confronts his father, the experience turns out to be conclusive but conclusive in an unexpected way. Meeting James Berry does not bring Williams closer to his father. Instead, the filmmaker's meeting with Berry enables Williams to understand his mother's resistance and experience. Williams understands why his mother wanted to keep her relationship with James Berry in the past. This is confirmed in the final scene with Williams' mother.

In this final scene, Williams tells Winnie that he really did not enjoy the experience of meeting his father: "He just didn't seem open minded." Winnie responds, "How could I be involved with someone like that!" Williams accepts the disappointment saying that what he thought was "going to change my life or make me whole" had little effect. Williams observes, "My life keeps on going." Winnie adds, "At one point in my life I wanted to find my father and with time that dissipated." The scene ends as the film roll runs out and the image changes from light-struck ends to black. Williams states,

"I don't feel love for somebody I don't really know. I don't feel a bond with this man but I do feel like I can be a man. I could be a father. I know my father. I feel like that's what came from it."

Sitting on a couch in Los Angeles, 1991, ten years after the shooting of the film began, Williams and Winnie have arrived at a deep, mutual understanding of who they are as people, mother and son. Winnie, now gray in her hair, acknowledges her son's resolve and his need to figure out these nagging questions. Williams acknowledges a now shared experience of James Berry and can understand his mother in a profoundly new way. This final trans-subjective turn depends on the passage of time. The chronological narrative structure, a choice determined by the filmmaker, works in the service of the representation of this transformation.

The autobiographical narrative is indeed a posterior intervention on these personal events. Yet the film's referential capacity lingers because it provides evidence of a present point of view which is attempting to represent or tell itself — an autobiographical act. Moreover, it clearly adds to the possibilities of what film autobiography can be. By establishing a shared subjectivity between filmmaker and mother, the film opens up the boundaries of individual autobiography onto a collective one. Also, the film's promise of autobiography is implicitly one which is still open for revision, still incomplete. The film magazine is running out just as Williams is attempting to summarize the film project and its value. This visual detail underscores the film's implicit dialectic, which resists complete autobiography and summary. Williams' life goes on. However, despite the film's acknowledgment of incompleteness, partial autobiography is still autobiography.[16]

IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS leaves us with a mother and son arriving at a positive place in their relationship. The film's dedication, "In honor and in memory of the strong black women of my family and throughout the Diaspora," marks this transformation on the part of the filmmaker. FINDING CHRISTA's dedication

reads in a somewhat similar fashion: "This film is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Alma Billops (Dotson) and Lucious 'Bill' Billops, my sister Josie May Dotson, our friend Melvyn Helstein and to all who search for children or parents." Such a dedication indicates a change in the filmmaker's perspective toward her daughter's attempts to reunite them. Like *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS*, a shared autobiography emerges in *FINDING CHRISTA* between a parent and child. Yet, in this case, the shared autobiography is indicated from the beginning.

The opening coda of the film begins with stills and home movies of Christa as a child. In voice over we hear an adult Christa state,

"My last memory of you is when you drove off and left me at the children's home society. I didn't understand why you left me. I felt so alone. Why did you leave me?"

Over home movies of Camille washing Christa as a baby, Camille responds, "I was trying to give her something else because I felt she needed a mother and a father. I'm sorry about the pain it caused Christa as a young child...But I'm not sorry for the act." This sound/ image montage summarizes the daughter's and mother's positions in the film *vis à vis* their past. Moreover, by constructing a dual subjectivity, the opening immediately establishes a reading of the film as a family portrait presented through the perspective and commentative voice of two people. This trans-subjective pattern appears more clearly at the end of *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* in the final scene between Williams and his mother.

FINDING CHRISTA presents a markedly different approach to the representation of time by relying less on an overall chronological narrative structure. While both films suggest a journey or quest in their titles, only *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS* withholds the actual meeting of the absent family member to the latter part of the film. In *FINDING CHRISTA*, the reuniting of Camille and Christa is so muted at the dramatic level that a viewer may not readily notice that the two women in the airport terminal sequence, occurring at the halfway point in the film, are Camille and Christa seeing each other after many years. Billops does not withhold her reuniting with her daughter until some moment toward the end of the film as a payoff to raised audience expectations, as is the case in Williams' film. Yet, upon closer analysis, the film yields micro-chronological narratives which function not only in the various thematic sections mentioned earlier but also overlap across sections as the story of Christa and Camille's reuniting develops.

FINDING CHRISTA utilizes the family portrait trope of the interview as its formal underpinning. The ontological status, the actual time and place, of these interviews matters less than what people are saying and to what points in the family history they are referring. The various interviews are intercut throughout, and the film does not suggest any chronological sequencing. This is most plainly seen in Billops' interview of her sister, Josie, which appears at the beginning of the film and at the end. Nonetheless, the film appropriates a complex weaving of oral testimonies by family members, friends, and the filmmaker (the social agents of the film) to construct a chronology of events that leads up to Christa's adoption, Christa's life with her adoptive family, and her bringing together both biological and adoptive mothers. What the film reveals is that the social agents in the film understand the answers they'll give to Billops' inquiry about family history as deriving from a result of a series of events which they can represent in an oral chronological narrative.

The film thematically organizes portions of testimonies as a way of reconstituting historical personal narrative.

The film also interrogates the validity of remembrances and testimonies, especially in the opening section which describes the events immediately preceding and succeeding Camille's relinquishing her daughter. This first section of the film — entitled "Why did you leave me?" — reconstructs this narrative mainly through oral testimonies. Over home movies of Billops' family, Camille states in voice over,

"There I was, nine months later with Tina and Beverly at my baby shower and no husband. What I wanted was the nuclear family. I'd wanted a little Hollywood thing...And when the third party wasn't there, then I didn't want to do it. If you are a single parent then you are just an unwed mother, which is close to...being a whore."

These observations are told to her sister, Josie, the first interviewee and clearly sympathetic to Camille's circumstances. Other family members appear less sympathetic.

This is especially the case for Camille's cousin, Alma, who is introduced as someone who was partially responsible for raising Christa. Alma feels that Camille had no good reason for giving up Christa. Alma suggests that Camille left Christa behind out for selfish reasons — that Camille had found her husband-to-be, James Hatch, and had an opportunity to start a new life. Camille's cousin, Marjorie, remembers that Camille's married sister, Billie, was willing to adopt Christa and that the family was ready and willing to share in the child's upbringing.

Subsequent to these scenes, Camille faces the camera and suggests an alternative narrative. She states that the family situation was far less congenial than people remember and that at age twenty-seven and unmarried, she was not able to be a good mother. Some thirty years later, Camille acknowledges a certain hypocrisy in the fact that men are not chastised for leaving and women are.[17] She now sees her response to her past predicament as an inchoate feminism which developed from that critical point. Moreover, from this entanglement of narratives emerges a chronological series of events about which actual participants have differing perspectives. Through these contradictory narratives, the film offers a variety of answers to the question, "Why did you leave me?" There is no doubt that the filmmaker's perspective holds more weight in this exchange, yet competing interpretations are voiced.

The second section of the film — "Christa where were you?" — attempts to answer this question by interviewing Christa's adoptive family in Oakland. In these interviews, Margaret, Christa's adoptive mother, gives a detailed account about the how, when and where of Christa's adoption.[18] Subsequent interviews of the siblings, consisting of anecdotal remembrances of their drive home from the orphanage, reveal the unknown parts of a life that continued after Camille left Christa. Christa, herself, appears in "staged" sequences of her singing performances, which she characterizes as "life songs." These staged sequences, consisting of both performances and re-enactments, run throughout the film and constitute another major filmic trope which comments on and serves as fantasies revolving around the weaving narrative.[19] Placed in such a relation, these scenes add another filmic strategy to comment on Christa and Camille's complicated life

narratives.

As the second section concludes, Margaret explains how Christa got married, began a career in the performing arts, yet was still unhappy. Margaret discloses that she told Christa to find her "mother." With the conclusion of this section, a portrait of Christa and her adoptive family emerges through oral testimonies, describing Christa's development into adulthood and marriage. At this juncture, the past family histories have been textually installed through a composite narrative derived from a variety of sources put in place by the filmmakers. Moreover, the film sets in place a potential problem, the balancing of two mothers and one daughter, which the rest of the film attempts to work out.

With Camille and Christa reunited, a problem is posed. Specifically, the emotional cost to those involved in the adoption, namely the two mothers and daughter, comes to the fore. At the conclusion, the film presents images of Margaret and Camille with a voice over by Christa stating,

"You know it's a blessing having two mothers. But at times it's also very difficult especially when both are very strong-willed people. Sometimes I feel as if I'm being pulled apart..I'm very fortunate to have a mother who has raised me and loved me unconditionally. I'm very blessed to have a mother who bore me and accepted me back into her life so that I could grow and learn more about myself."

Such a realization forces all parties to alter radically their concepts of who they thought they were in relation to each other. Indeed, Margaret, in what amounts to an extraordinary act of good will, tells Christa that she wants Christa to live in New York not only to pursue her career but also to get to know Camille better.

These familial rearrangements subtend how FINDING CHRISTA presents an African American matriarchal world. Devoid of any patriarchal forces, the new arrangements achieved at the conclusion of the film are markedly nonhierarchical. As Marco Williams arrives at a new-found understanding of who his mother is through their shared experience of James Berry, Margaret, Christa, and Camille reside in an alternative family only arrived at through a process represented through a narrative highly dependent upon the passage of time. Each filmmaker has, in Sitney's words, "invented forms" for the autobiographical impulse to tell a life story and refer to history.

In *I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou writes,

"The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance."[20]

IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS and FINDING CHRISTA concludes with a discovery and acceptance of mothers, self, and past. The discovery of these mothers acknowledges them as "formidable characters who have managed a life outside the over-determined boundaries established for African American mothers. This process of discovery, inextricably bound to the passage of time, is another example of the cultural and political potential of the autobiographical documentary now

strategically invoked by African American documentarists.

NOTES

1. P. Adams Sitney, "Autobiography in the Avant-Garde," *Millennium Film Journal* 1:1, 1977-78, pp. 104-105. My italics.

2. Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 180.

3. With the advancement of film studies, defining "documentary" has rightfully become a complicated challenge. Frequently, other film traditions such as the avant-garde or even fiction film obfuscate the boundaries that distinguish documentary from other forms of film and video. Bill Nichols' seminal work on documentary has, however, established a framework to which current definitions and discussions of documentary remain indebted. For the purposes of my essay, I will rely on Nichols' emphasis on documentary's use of sound and image as evidence presented in the service of an argument that emanates from social or historical registers. See, Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 12-31. For a broader examination of the historical development of the notion of documentary and photographic media, see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

4. John Stuart Katz, Judith Milstein Katz and Jay Ruby have laid out the most detailed account of the movement of autobiography and documentary film. Katz and Katz have defined the autobiographical documentary in terms of content, films which focus on the self, i.e., the filmmaker, and form, which is linked to a level of intimacy that is reflected in the cinematic style, distinguishing autobiographical documentaries from other films. For a further discussion of how ethics are inscribed in these films see John Stuart Katz and Judith Milstein Katz, "Ethics and the Perception of Ethics in Autobiographical Film," in Larry Gross, John Katz and Jay Ruby, eds., *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film and Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 119-133. For an overview of the historical development of the autobiographical documentary, see articles by Jay Ruby, "The Celluloid Self," pp. 7-9 and John Stuart Katz, "Autobiographical Film," pp. 10-15 in John Stuart Katz, ed., *Autobiography: Film / Video / Photography* (Toronto: Media Programmes division of the Education Branch, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1978). For a discussion of autobiographical theory and documentary, see Michael Renov, "The Subject in History: The New Autobiography in Film and Video." *Afterimage*, 17:1, Summer, 1989, pp. 4-7. and Jim Lane, "Notes on Theory and the Autobiographical Documentary Film," *Wide Angle* 15:3, 1993. pp. 21-32.

5. Marlon Riggs's *TONGUES UNTIED* (1989) and his posthumously produced *BLACK IS...BLACK AIN'T* (1995) are other recent examples of African American autobiographical documentaries.

6. I am referring to attitudes initiated by historians such as Stanley Elkins in *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, 2d. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) and public policy makers such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan in *The Negro Family: The Case of National Action*

(Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Labor, March, 1965) and *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: Free Press, 1969). These studies focused on the "problem" of black male disenfranchisement from society and specifically the family. They viewed the black male as an impotent figure in need of revitalization. Attitudes arose in mainstream United States suggesting that the "problem" could be solved by buttressing the black male. The matriarchal, black U.S. family was considered a failure or breakdown. African American female positions were effectively denied their history. Since Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society," the African American family has been the focus of liberal points of view, which often patronize, and of neo-conservative views, which demonize the African American family as the cause of the "welfare state." For a more detailed discussion of the cultural attitudes engendered by historians and policy makers, see Deborah Gray White, *Ain't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985). Rose M. Brewer reminds us that exclusively emphasizing the cultural traditions of black families in the United States as a way to explain their situation in advanced capitalism is to ignore vital economic and social factors which already put black Americans at a distinct disadvantage to whites in the market place. See Rose M. Brewer, "Black Women in Poverty: Some Comments on Female-Headed Families," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture* (13:2, 1988), pp. 331-339.

7. Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.) Regarding this argument see, especially, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," pp. 125.

8. In literary autobiographical studies, this debate has been ongoing since the seventies. For a more detailed account, see Christine Downing, "Re-Visioning Autobiography: The Bequest of Freud and Jung," *Soundings* 60 (1977), pp. 210-28, and John Sturrock, "The New Model Autobiographer," *New Literary History* 9(1977), pp. 51-63. These authors assert the inadequacy of narrative and chronology to address autobiography and claim that new autobiography, based on the structures of Freudian and Lacanian concepts of the unconscious, is in order. The new autobiographical language is based on a poetic or anti-narrative strategy. Michael Renov asserts a similar call for film and video autobiography in his essay, "The Subject in History: The New Autobiography in Film and Video."

9. In literary autobiographical studies, critics have noted this as being a frequently used structure in the tradition of written autobiography. Authors often rid a negative, past self in favor a present, more positive, image of the self. Autobiography serves a purging function in this case. See, for example, James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). Because of the conventional aspects of this narrative trajectory, some critics question the validity of such autobiographies. See, for instance, Jeffrey Melhman, *A Structural Study of Autobiography: Proust, Leiris, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

10. Considering this issue, I am indebted to work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur insists on the "reciprocity between narrativity and temporality." See "Narrative Time," in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp.

11. See Paul DeMan, "Autobiography as Defacement," *MLA*, 94, 1979, pp. 919-30.

12. Paul John Eakin, "Narrative and Chronology as Structures of Reference and the New Model Autobiographer," in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 32.

13. In choosing this representational strategy, Williams joins other autobiographical documentarists who have utilized chronological narrative as their principal organizing structure. I am thinking of Ed Pincus and *DIARIES* (1971-1976) (1981) which covers five years, Mark Rance and *DEATH AND THE SINGING TELEGRAM* (1983) which covers five years, and Ross McElwee's *SHERMAN'S MARCH* (1986) which covers two and one half years. Like McElwee, Williams had many edited versions of his film through the ten-year period of time he was shooting. He saw his footage, knew what he had, and planned shoots based on this material. This point should not be underestimated in terms of its influence on the design of the film. Ed Pincus, who initiated the practice of shooting autobiographical sync-sound documentary over long periods, opted not to look at his shot footage until after the shooting was completed. He did not want any reactions he might have to the footage to influence how he would live and film his life. To date, only Jerome Hill's groundbreaking *FILM PORTRAIT* (1972) covers the majority of the lifetime of the film autobiographer. Because of its extensive intercutting of interviews around thematic topics and the use of home movies and family snap shots, *FINDING CHRISTA* is more aligned with the family portrait tradition within the autobiographical documentary. *FINDING CHRISTA* shares affinities with documentaries like Martha Coolidge's *DAVID OFF AND ON* (1972), Alfred Guzzetti's *FAMILY PORTRAIT SITTINGS* (1975), Martin Scorsese *ITALIAN-AMERICAN* (1975), and more recent examples such as Abraham Ravett's *EVERYTHING'S FOR YOU* (1989), Richard Fung's *MY MOTHER'S PLACE* (1990), Rea Tajiri's *HISTORY AND MEMORY* (1991), and Mindy Faber's *DELIRIUM* (1993). For more on the family portrait documentary see Elisabeth Weiss, "Family Portraits," *American Film*, 1:2(1975): 54-59. Also, see the special issue on the cultural and aesthetic significance of home movies in *The Journal of Film and Video*, 38:3-4, 1986. I draw amore detailed distinction between these types of autobiographies in my book, *The Autobiographical Documentary in America: An Analysis of Self-Inscription in Film and Video*, forthcoming from the University of Wisconsin Press.

14. Sound for this particular sequence was recorded by a microphone directed toward the listening component of an off-screen telephone extension.

15. For a discussion of how film might alter autobiography; see Elizabeth Bruss, "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film" in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 298-320. Bruss suggests that film might be the most significant medium for moderm autobiography. According to Bruss, film autobiography differs from classical written autobiography because film autobiography "can take identity beyond what one consciousness can grasp, beyond even what the unaided human consciousness can encompass." (p. 319) This observation addresses the shift to a collective subjectivity suggested at the end of *IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS*. Although her article raises many critical points about autobiography in film, Bruss

curiously ignores the significance of the convergence of documentary and autobiography choosing to focus on the personal cinema of modernist filmmakers like Truffaut and Fellini.

16. Jerome Bruner emphasizes the constructed aspects of autobiography and analyzes the conventions of life narrative as a way to discuss the culture from which they emerge and concludes that the conventions of narrative and the course of life coincide. See Jerome Bruner, "Life as Narrative," *Social Research* 54:1(1987), pp. 11-32. Related to this argument is Karl J. Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," *Critical Inquiry* 1(1975), pp. 821-48 and Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time."

17. Clearly, IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS is a response to this observation. The reader should note that IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS was released one year later.

18. The whereabouts of Christa's adoptive father is unclear.

19. Such staged sequences and re-enact LIGHTNING OVER WATER: NICK'S FILM (1982), Tony Buba's LIGHTNING OVER BRADDOCK: A RUSTBOWL FANTASY (1989), Jan Oxenberg's THANK YOU AND GOODNIGHT (1991) and Mindy Faber's DELIRIUM (1993).

20. Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York; Bantam Books, 1980). p. 231.

DISTRIBUTORS

IN SEARCH OF OUR FATHERS (1992). Filmmaker's Library, 124 E. 40 St., Suite 901, New York, New York 10016

FINDING CHRISTA (1991). Hatch-Billops Productions, 491 Broadway, 7th Floor, New York, New York 10012. 212-966-3231

The Making of "Monsters" The queer as producer

by R. Bruce Brasell

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Walter Benjamin, in his 1937 essay on Marxist aesthetics, "The Author as Producer,"[1][[open notes in new window](#)] proposes that when approaching a work of art,

"Rather than asking, what is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time?... [we should] ask, what is its position in them? (222)"

When critics focus on an artistic work's position in the process of production, they shift the debate in Marxist aesthetics away from just being concerned with a work's political correctness. They also include a discussion of its technique, making the work "accessible to a social, and therefore a materialist analysis." (222)

Though Benjamin is concerned with a Marxist aesthetics and therefore focuses on the proletariat, in a post-neo-Marxist epoch where class has been subsumed by the identity politics of difference, his concerns can be expanded to include all identities (i.e., race, gender, and sexualities, as well as class) which constitute multiple sites of struggle in society. Using Benjamin's basic concepts, I will focus on gay and lesbian identities and their position within the relations of film production in the United States and Canada. John Greyson's 1991 film, *THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS,"* provides an ideal film text for the discussion of how these concerns intersect.

Though my discussion will focus on gay and lesbian identities, I do not mean to imply that it is a privileged identity over the myriad other subject positions which we occupy. Though we live in many differences (e.g., race, sexuality, gender, class), many which are not mutually exclusive, my aim is to consider how the particular difference of gay and lesbian identity is different and to explore its specificities. However, as Trinh T. Minh-ha reminds us,

"Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider — two entities — they are also at work within the outsider or the insider — a single entity." [2]

Therefore, I will explore not only how sexual identity differs from other identities

(such as race) and how the sexual identity of gay and lesbian identity differs from other sexual identities (such as heterosexuality), but also how there are different gay and lesbian identities.

HOMO/ GAY/ QUEER IDENTITIES

What is the relationship between identity formation and social modes of relations? After the Stonewall riots of 1969, one of the ways the emerging gay movement (in both its gay liberation and gay rights forms) distinguished itself from the earlier homophile movement was through the language used to describe itself. The shift from "homosexual" to "gay" signaled a linguistic reflection of a social group's move from accepting an identity defined from without to creating a self-definition.

"Homosexual" has served as a "scientific" medical term which emerged out of the sexology movement of the late nineteenth century. It signifies a medical model of homosexuality as a disease, a perspective which many leaders of the homophile movement accepted. In contrast, "gay" as a term for same-sex desire emerged out of the homosexual community itself, the word's positive connotations kidnapped for homosexual signification. "Gay" came to connote pride, self-affirmation, and positive image formation.

Gay liberation and gay rights organizations existed simultaneously for a time, along with the earlier homophile organizations. Just as the gay community did not experience a linear succession from homophile to gay liberation to gay rights, so too there was not a linear progression from the term "homosexual" to "gay." The terms co-existed, as they continue to do so today. What I am arguing is a shift in emphasis. Gay Liberation, a specific historical movement periodized by many from 1969 to 1972, aligned itself with the other New Left movements of its time (many which did not want its camaraderie), seeking to liberate "the homosexual" in all individuals. It focused on patriarchy as the cause of both sexism and homophobia. That movement was eventually overshadowed by its more narrowly defined gay rights counterpart and dissipated during the early seventies.[3] The triumph of a single-issue reformist focus over a multi-issue revolutionary one paralleled the consolidation of "gay" as connoting white middle-class men with a desire for integration into society.

Since the emergence of AIDS another paradigm shift has transpired, with its linguistic reflection being the shift from "gay" to "queer." "Queer" has none of the niceties of "gay" and critiques what "gay" has become over the past two decades. Though queer may at first appear to be just a reclamation of the earlier gay movement's lost radical edge (after all, ACT-UP's zaps on AIDS-related issues have their antecedent in the Gay Liberation Front's zaps on psychiatric and medical issues), there are differences between the two identity formations. Instead of creating positive identities through new terms in reaction to society's negative ones, queer, in a postmodern move, seeks identity formation by raiding society's negative terms, not only reappropriating them but also redefining them in the process. A comparison of the movements' key slogans highlights their differences — "Gay is Good" vs. "We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to It." Queer represents an "in your face" attitude in its focus on transgressive rather than positive images.

In contradistinction to the failed inclusivity of "gay," "queer" is meant to be an all-inclusive term for sexuality, a signifier undifferentiated by sex, gender, race, class, or other factors. But even the term "queer" exists as a site of struggle for definition.

While some view its usage as already drifting toward "white men"[4] (like the term "gay"), others seek to explode its definition even further than same-sex relations, making it a term of "other sexuality," thereby including, for example, heterosexuals who enjoy anal sex. But queerness is based as much on attitude as on sexual practice, on what is done with one's mind as well as with one's body.

This recent paradigm shift affects not only the linguistic terms used to describe the individual, but also the social formation of those individuals. For example, "gay and lesbian" is usually combined with "community," while queer is linked with "nation." While gays seek to be integrated into society or to at least have "separate but equal" structures, queers call for a civil war.

What is queer nationalism? Taking as a postulate that queer is anti-assimilationist, then it represents a position outside "normal" society. But rather than viewing itself as a subculture subsumed within a dominant culture, or a marginal group on the border of a dominant society, it refers to a parallel cultural system, an/other nation. But this does not mean nation in the sense of a geographical area with physically defined boundaries, but rather nation as a discursive formation, an imaginary construct that depends "on an apparatus of cultural fictions"[5] for its existence. If nationalism "invents nations where they do not exist, (Brennan, 49)" then queer nationalism can invent a nation of queers.

Queer nationalism can be viewed as a means to circumvent the cultural dependency of the center/ margin paradigm with its circle model and the culture/ subculture paradigm with its subset model. However, in an age of multinational capitalism, no nation can truly be separate because all nations are bound by "the logic of consumer capitalism." [6] And as any nation may have an unbalanced ratio of exports to imports, resulting in unequally distributed trade with other nations (which, ironically, can be viewed as a cultural/ political/ economic version of sexual "trade" with straights). A queer nation [7] is no exception; it indicates a position of neocolonialism in terms of "straight" cultural hegemony. The notion of a queer nation remains ambivalent, because, though queer attempts to contest, to break down sexual boundaries, nationalism seeks to establish them through the creation of a people with a particular bond.

Benjamin and Brecht both thought in terms of a hierarchy of power, the powerful and the powerless, embodied in the overarching two groups of the class struggle, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This concept of the oppressor and the oppressed contrasts sharply with the Foucauldian idea of power as a technique of domination, operating in a diffused manner, in which we "are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising...power." [8] This neo-post-Marxist view sees power as a struggle over the production of knowledge. The site of this struggle is manifold. Therefore, queer identity is not the revolutionary struggle, but rather one site of struggle among many within societies. And just as the film production apparatus represents only one site of a queer struggle, so also that same apparatus has become the site of struggle for other identity groups. In addition, the queer struggle takes place not only with straight society but also the gay and lesbian community.

AN/OTHER MODE OF FILM PRODUCTION

So what relation exists between the social process of film production and queer

nationalism? If "Hollywood" functions as the "normal" mode of film production, then what becomes the abnormal mode? Does an "other" discourse require another mode of production to ensure its "fair" presentation?

Queer filmmaking is not a new art world but rather shares affinities with the already existing alternative cinema practices of women's counter-cinema, black independent cinema, and third cinema because they all emerge from a position of otherness in relation to the Hollywood production paradigm. Manthia Diawara proposes

"the discourse of Blackness as an enabling paradigm for other repressed discourses such as feminism, Gay and Lesbian rights, and minority discourses in totalitarian systems...[because it] is a transforming and transformative space to be filled by freedom-seeking people...[T]he linking of Blackness to the categories of freedom and equality prevents it from ever reaching closure and fixity. The discourse of Blackness is always moving toward the zones of oppression. It is for this reason that it has been used as a model by Feminism, Chicano Studies, and Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movements." [9]

Diawara presents this "enabling" as unidirectional, ignoring the simultaneous presences of similarities and differences when one identity of otherness is compared to another one. As opposed to prioritizing Blackness, or for that matter Queerness, as the overarching paradigm of an identity that can articulate all otherness, we need "an/other" paradigm which acknowledges that within the commonality of otherness live many different others, each with their own unique specificities that differentiate them from one an/other as well as from non-others.

"An/other" identity is open-ended, shifting, fluid — a positionality that has been claimed as descriptive of women, blacks, queers and numerous other identity groups. For example, Stuart Hall views the diaspora experience and the relationship to the past as the primary structuring features of Afro-Caribbean Black identity, [10] criteria he uses to arrive at Black identity as a positionality of fluidity, an/other identity as I have defined it. As will be discussed later, I arrive at the same position for queers, though through a different path. The specificities of each identity group that leads to this common position of otherness are different. Epistemologically, their differences form their unity.

Though an/other film production apparatus exists outside Hollywood, it does not form an internally cohesive group but rather indicates kinds of production unified by a structuring absence, Hollywood. These other modes of film production seek to undermine or ignore Hollywood structures and conventions. They have to operate on the lower end of the film production scale because of their antagonism to the economic, aesthetic, and/or narrative demands of that "normal" market. Just as an/other identity is fluid, so too is an/other mode of film production. This fluidity occurs at both the level of the social relations of film production and also at the discursive level of the films produced. Benjamin warns that

"the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing qualities of revolutionary themes, indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class which owns it, seriously into question." (Benjamin, 229)

Though Benjamin's discussion of "themes" appears to imply political content, if the content of a work operates in a dialectical relationship with its technique, then the term "themes" encompasses the more formal aspects of an artwork as well. Therefore, the discourse of a film is produced through a reading of both its subject matter and style. The Hollywood means of production continually tries to assimilate new forms/ contents for its own ends. Once new forms have been subsumed into the established means of production, the new techniques become old ones and a producer outside the "normal" means of production must search for "new" new ones.

Brecht provides a potential way around the problem of co-optation in his essay "Popularity and Realism" when he states, "There is not only such a thing as being popular, there is also the process of becoming popular." [11] By the time a particular art form becomes popular it has usually solidified its structure, thereby making it easier to co-opt its form. While within an uncompleted stage, still changing shape, the object has a fluidity, which makes it too slippery to be grasped without a struggle. "Becoming popular" is what I would call that slippery form, one positioned within the process of formation rather than at its completion, positioned where experimentation is the norm rather than the exception. The boundary where becoming popular crosses over to being popular is forever shifting, dependent upon the historical context. Today's transgression can quickly become tomorrow's norm. "Becoming popular" reflects an/other filmmaker's position of antagonism in relation to Hollywood.

To guarantee discursive fluidity, filmmakers usually have to operate on a smaller economic scale. Budget constraints often necessitate breaching specialization in order to complete the film with the limited economic resources available. According to Benjamin,

"technical progress is for the author as producer the foundation of his [sic] political progress. In other words, only by transcending the specialization in the process of production that, in the bourgeois view, constitutes its order can one make this production politically useful. (Benjamin, 230)

Filmmakers breach specialization in two ways: combining different roles into one position in the production of a film and exchanging different roles over time in the production of many films.

One way to approach these filmmakers would be to view them through the model usually applied to art cinema and certain Hollywood cinema, auteurism. Auteurism focuses on the film director as the originator of the film text, whether as the artistic personality behind its creation [12] or the organizing structure that stamps it with a unique or distinctive meaning. [13] However, the social relations of an/other film production process are more ambiguous than the term "auteur" implies, with its focus on only one position within that process. But more importantly, auteurism ignores some of the key elements of an/other mode of production that differentiate it from Hollywood. These elements include distribution and spectatorship.

I prefer to approach these filmmakers not as individuals — auteurs — but rather as a group with a specific signifying practice, producers of discourse — discourse not

"as groups of signs ...but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak." [14] An/other mode of film production really refers to m(an)y/other modes of production, categorizable according to the types of audiences attracted to and spectators produced by their discourses.

Benjamin viewed the author not as the creator of an artistic work but rather the producer of an artistic product. As a cultural worker, the author should not only change the subject matter presented through the cultural productive apparatus, but s/he should also activate a transformation in the apparatus itself in order to serve, according to Benjamin and Brecht the class struggle, in my framework the struggle for social change. Brecht coined the term "umfunktionierung," refunctionalization, to describe this process,

"the structural reorganization of the relationship between the stage, the author, and the audience... in order to bring about a more democratic structure of communication. (Mueller, 21)"

According to Benjamin the cultural "apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers — that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. (Benjamin, 283)" Benjamin presents Brecht's epic theater as an exemplary case because it "succeeded in changing the functional connection between stage and public, text and performance, director and actor. (Benjamin, 234)"

An/other film production apparatus refunctionalizes the cinema as a means to form, consolidate, provoke, or reflect an/other subject position. This reorganizing of the film production apparatus can occur only through a collaborative effort between the particular identity group and filmmakers. The identity group forms an audience for the exhibition of the filmmaker's films. Because of the non-Hollywood commercial status of this mode of film production, its distribution channels are primarily alternative viewing venues such as not-for-profit theatres, community centers, film festivals, and university classrooms. [15] The filmmakers, in turn, produce discursive film objects that assist in the production of desiring subject positions within the identity group.

For queerness, this means queers function as producers. Queer audiences and queer filmmakers collaborate to produce a queer discourse, one which exists not only during the film viewing process but which also circulates outside in the streets of the lesbian and gay community. One of the primary places that functions as a site for the production of this discourse is lesbian and gay film festivals. In New York City, even though there are two lesbian and gay film festivals, the "mainstream" New Festival and the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival, many of the same films get screened at both festivals, blurring an easy differentiation between them. The film festival system establishes a space for a spectatorial audience that may not share a common aesthetic taste, but which does share a common desire to see discursive fictions of their lives projected cinematically on the screen. Queer films can be identified not by whether they contain a particular type of imagery or representation, but rather by the presence of a particular type of signification, a signification that is fluid.

QUEER CINEMATIC SIGNIFICATION

So, how do you cinematically signify queerness? In the cinema, the sensual

signifiers of the visual and aural levels of perception predominate in determining a film character's identity — touch and smell normally excluded by the nature of the technology. Any character's identity can easily be identified aurally through dialogue; however, visually, sexual identity confounds the notion of cinematic representation because it has no readily available visual signifier. In the late nineteenth century the sexologists sought the physiological root of homosexuality, but ended up defining its principal physical characteristics as the manifestation of cross-gender dressing and/or behavior. This reductive strategy of queer identification which conflates sexual identity with gender is still used today by many Hollywood films.

Because U.S. society presumes an individual's sexual identity as hetero/ straight unless proven otherwise, hetero/ straight identity can be represented in isolation by de facto cultural presumptions, for individuals are not outed as hetero/ straight, only as homo/ gay/ queer. If an individual desires queer identification, the burden of proof rests on that individual's identifying him or herself as such. She/he must do this either aurally or through adopting cultural codes of queer signification which would allow her or him to be read as such. For example, Harry Hay describes how during the twenties and thirties, if a man wore a red necktie or a handkerchief that matched his necktie, "you figured that there was a brother there." [16] But cultural signifiers are forever shifting, as reflected by red neckties becoming a power sign for businessmen during the eighties. In addition, the knowledge of these unique visual signifiers predominately remain the purview of the gay and lesbian community itself, an intracultural means of signification rather than an intercultural one, usually remaining inaccessible to nonmembers of the group.

If the visual reading of the queer body does not provide any identifiable physical characteristics and if visual cultural codes, other than the most reductive ones, have a limited circulation of knowledge, is queer identity dependent upon interactive social relations to be visually readable? Two individuals of the same sex engaged in non-genital/ oral touching is ambiguous, because, after all, some hetero/ straights can (and do) show non-sexual (whatever that term means) affection to the same sex. But can a kiss between two individuals of the same sex really signify queerness either? [17] Or, to be certain, must visual representation include pornographic sex? But straight male pornography often has girl-on-girl sex scenes, in which the straight women (according to the narrative) only "play" with lesbian sex. If sexual behavior cannot guarantee sexual identity, then how does a film signify queer identity?

Because queerness does not have a readily available visual signifier that allows viewers to read its "realness," it problematizes the relationship between the referent and the signifier. Queerness calls into question the relation of appearance to being, as reflected by the surprised expression uttered by some when discovering someone is queer — "You'd never know it to look at her (or him)." Therefore, the queer can be seen as producing a discourse that challenges the visual because it does not manifest itself through physical characteristic, but rather depends on cultural codes that are continually shifting. This identity could become attached to anyone involuntarily, either intentionally or mistakenly. Whites involved in the civil rights movement were called "nigger lovers" by racists. In contrast, "straights" involved with queers risk being labeled "faggots" by homophobics, not "faggot

lovers." When outsiders take a position of solidarity with queers, they risk collapsing their own identity into the one with whom they sympathize; they risk being perceived by others as queer too. The mediation of that solidarity appears transparent when compared to solidarities with other types of differences.

THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS" AND QUEER MODES OF FILM PRODUCTION

John Greyson's 1991 short film *THE MAKING OF 'MONSTERS'* provides within its narrative an illustration of some of the concerns discussed above about queer identities and the social modes of film production. Greyson's film concerns the making of a documentary by fictional black lesbian filmmaker Lotte Lenya (yes, named after the woman who was the greatest interpreter of Kurt Weill's music as well as married to him) about making a made-for-television musical movie titled "Monsters." The TV movie has as its subject matter the murder of a gay man, Joe McQuire, in Toronto's Bellwood Park by a group of teenage boys.

As a result of this multilayered narrative structure, the film reflexively deals with the film production apparatus on three different levels: making a commercial fiction film, making a documentary about making a commercial film, and Greyson's film about making a documentary about making a fictional commercial film. Greyson's film not only explores notions of realism but also functions to confound categories such as documentary and fiction, and this is all done within the context of queer politics.

The film begins as a "straight" documentary in the typical Canada Broadcast Corporation (CBC) style. The viewer realizes something has run amuck when told that Georg Lukács and Brecht, two dead men, are the musical's producer and director respectively. Then Brecht is introduced as a catfish. Eventually the documentary narrative of Lenya's film breaks down completely when, after the shooting for the day has ended, two of the actors in "Monsters" walk into the park singing about the difference between a lover and "tricks." At that point we are in a film that narratively can only be Greyson's film, not Brecht's "Monsters" or Lenya's *THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS."*

Brecht is not "actually" a catfish, only visually represented by one, for the catfish that we see speaks a Brechtian discourse. He seems to think like Brecht, even if he does not look like the Brecht we see in pictures. Werner Mittenzwei paraphrases Brecht as remarking,

"The living, irreplaceable man [sic]...should not be identical with his portrait and this contradiction should be expressed in the image." [18]

The catfish character calls into question the issue of representation through discrepancies between signifier, signified and referent. For Brecht realism did not reside in "faithfully" representing sensuous reality but in representing — illusionistically or expressionistically — the conditions of life:

"discovering the causal complexes of society/ unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power." (Brecht, 82)

Brecht "defines realism exclusively in terms of its goal, rather than its conventions." [19]

According to Eugene Lunn,

"By accentuating contradictions between everyday appearance and what is historically realizable, Brecht hoped to galvanize his audience into action outside the theater. Art needed to be 'open-ended,' to be completed by the audience, and not 'closed' by the author's reconciliation of contradictions...Brecht's art aimed to assault his audience's passive and fatalistic inertia, its adjustment to the 'course of things.' The shocks of 'estrangement' from "normal" perceptions were urgently needed to encourage active intervention into the historical process." [20]

Just as the character of Brecht does not look human, so too when we are introduced to his goldfish boyfriend Kurt Weill, Weill does not look queer. Greyson appropriates an "abnormal" representation to present Brecht. The question of what is normal is a contradiction Greyson also leaves open and unreconciled in *THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS."* The widowed lover, nailing his murdered lover's coffin, states, "he was...normal," while the murderers are described as "normal teenage boys" by their parents and neighbors. The queer — the abnormal — is needed to provide the shock to wake us out of the normal, to challenge the society of normalization.

Greyson uses the competing definitions of realism proposed by Lukács and Brecht to structure the style of the film. After the spectator is sutured into a melodramatic narrative reminiscent of the realistic style Lukács advocates, the (normal) narrative is interrupted and made strange (abnormal), thereby providing the spectator with the distance needed to allow for a critical analysis of the scene. This creates an open-ended narrative structure, which confronts the spectator with contradictory emotions through the juxtaposition of the scenes. For example, while washing dishes, Joe McQuire's mother describes her reactions to seeing at the "sentencing hearing" the teenage boys who murdered her son. She states,

"They're all normal. That's the answer to the big riddle...Their boys are normal, and it's normal to kill homosexuals."

This moving melodramatic scene is suddenly ruptured when "Cut" is called. Brecht, whom we learn has been directing the "realistic" scene we were watching, responds by stating that the scene stinks. He describes it as "shallow sentimentality, the mythic mother, guaranteed to make the audience cry." Dialogue which appears "sincere" is constantly undercut, turned in upon itself, through the multilayered structure of the plot. As a result of this strategy, the film places the spectator in a reflexive position of calling into question what s/he hears and sees, a queer position.

The two films within Greyson's film show the two different modes of film production discussed earlier: the normal/ commercial and the abnormal/ alternative. Brecht, within the "normal" social relations of film production, plans to direct a fictional film that contains a call to queer political action through Brechtian devices. But the producer, Lukács, resists the use of this form. Over dinner at a seafood restaurant, Lukács describes to Brecht his plans for shooting the film with "sympathetic realistic characters," his dialogue accompanied by storyboard illustrations. Brecht, however, sets about shooting the film as he desires,

infuriating Lukács who eventually fires him.

After relieving Brecht of directorial responsibilities, Lukács begins directing realistically the fag bashing scene in the park, at which point the storyboard illustrations return. While filming the scene Lukács backs into the fish tank holding Brecht, tumbling it over. As the "accident" occurs, a shot of an illustrated storyboard of the incident is inserted. The storyboarding of the "accident" reveals that Brecht's demise was written into the commercial production's script from the beginning. Brecht was directing a film and producing a discourse that could not fit into a "normal" mode of production. His queer filmic discourse was bashed by the commercial production apparatus through which he sought to produce it.

Lenya encounters a similar fate after the "accident" when Lukács fires her and confiscates all of her documentary footage. Though she was operating at the lower end of the film production apparatus, performing all of the production functions herself, she was still dependent upon the "normal" production apparatus for her existence. The demise of Lenya's documentary film serves as a warning that whether one is at the higher or lower end of the production apparatus is irrelevant if one still depends upon the "normal" production apparatus for existence. The production process of a queer film must be anti-assimilationist if it is to survive.

For me, the funniest humor is that which, though funny on the face, contains an underlying, often biting social commentary. The songs in *THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS"* are full of this kind of humor, as illustrated by the lyrics of the opening song, "I Hate Straights":

"Straights breed babies, straights breed violence, through their churches and through their states. Queers must rise up, fight the monsters. Shout out loud dear, I hate straights."

The song places the concerns of the film-fag bashing-within a queer nationalistic framework; problems do not come from the actions of a few "bad" individuals but rather from the structures of "normal" society itself. As queers, Brecht and Lenya were doomed to fail while working within "normal" modes of film production; a queer one was needed for their success.

Like Brecht and Lenya, Greyson's film was also bashed by a straight cultural apparatus, not the Canadian film apparatus, but the United States' music apparatus. Some of the songs in the film, such as "I Hate Straights," are set to music written by Kurt Weill. When Greyson learned that his film might have wider distribution possibilities than just the festival circuit, he sought to obtain the appropriate broader publishing rights to the music to allow for commercial distribution. Though he had been able to raise the money to purchase the publishing rights, after six months of negotiating, the Weill estate refused to release them, because it apparently did not appreciate Weill being represented in the film by a queer goldfish. Given Brecht's penchant for basing his plays on other texts, as was the case with the musicals he collaborated on with Weill, it is ironic that the Weill estate, in addition to denying the broader publishing rights, also withdrew the festival rights that it had previously granted Greyson. This action by the Weill estates resulted in the film having to be pulled from circulation even in noncommercial distribution channels.[21]

Of the three film productions on which Brecht participated, in *THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS"* clips are shown only from *The Threepenny Opera*, the one he sued the film company over for its filmic adaptation of his play. According to Roswitha Mueller, the purpose of Brecht's lawsuit was not to argue for auteurism but rather to show the contradiction which exists between the bourgeois ideology of protecting individual rights (including the artist) and the "actual" social practice of the production of that ideology. As Mueller explains, in Brecht's view,

"the method of cultural production by a group of people, rather than by the traditional 'inspired genius,' carried within itself the potential of a more progressive form of cultural production." (Mueller, 20)

Queers as producers form such a group of people. Queer filmmakers, audiences, and films are coming together to produce an/other cultural apparatus, one which will serve queer interest. Instead of taking legal action against the Weill estate for its withdrawal of the previously granted festival rights, Greyson plans to wait for the year 2001 when Weill's music will pass into the public domain. At that time *THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS"* will finally be able to be re-released, this time with the possibility of commercial exhibition if a distributor is found.

Just as Greyson articulates through the character of Brecht a critique of "normal" modes of film production, he also uses Lenya to articulate a critique of queer nationalism. He sees within queer nationalism some of the same problems of the straight community, as well as the gay and lesbian community. While being wired for an interview, the actor playing Joe McQuire in the musical film sympathetically asks Lenya if the film crew was giving her a hard time with their "straight white males doing their macho bonding number." Later, when discussing a Queer Nation meeting they both attended, he asks her what she thought about it. She responded that she "felt a little out of place with all those gay white males doing their macho bonding number." Queer politics, which was to place women on equal status with men and people of color with whites, faces the same criticism as gay and straight politics on the issues of gender and race.

Yet despite Lenya's ambivalence toward queer nationalism, she sings, "Bash Back, Baby," at the end of the film, accompanied by the actor portraying "the murder victim," Joe McQuire. They sing for queers to bash the courts, the schools, the laws, the cops, the churches, the army, and a whole list of other institutions and states of mind that try to make queers victims. They call for queers to "change the institutions." Though this phrase may appear reformist at first, as the lyrics continue with, "Let's burn the plantation...It's time to riot. Bash back, baby, the street is ours," one realizes that change is meant not in terms of reform, a change of an element, but rather a replacement of the whole—a call to civil war.

Queer identity can be viewed as a two-edged sword, a single blade with two different sides: "being queer" and "becoming queer." "Being queer," flaunting one's abnormality, provides shock value for normality. In Brechtian terms, being queer can be viewed as being a producer of estrangement effects designed to provoke alienation.

On the other hand, "becoming queer" plays off the queer's challenge to visual representation, calling into question the representable, the relation of the signifier and signified to the referent. As discussed earlier, to avoid co-optation, the style of

queer films should remain in that slippery formation stage of "becoming popular." "Becoming queer" represents a comparably slippery stage, a continual instability and ability of queer identity to be applied to anyone and to all. As long as "being queer" remains an insult, then "becoming queer" can provide a challenge to normality because it provides uncertainty over who "really" is one. As a result, "becoming queer" has become a site of knowledge struggle as reflected by the wave of denials in response to "outings" over the last few years.

Queerness calls into question the normality of normalness, and queer filmmakers provide a challenge to the "normal" social relations of film production. If "it's normal to kill homosexuals," then abnormality for all becomes the constitutional foundation of a queer nation. If this current social/ political economic system is "normal," then we need queer abnormality to shock us into creating change.

"The time has come, this is the hour
That the murder of my friend
Upon whom as is known my soul depended
That the murder of my Gaveston shall be
Atoned for."

— Brecht's *Edward II* [22]

"Bash Back, Baby."

— Greyson's THE MAKING OF "MONSTERS"

NOTES

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 220-238. For further discussion of Benjamin's article see: Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 60-70; Roswitha Mueller, *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 21.

2. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Outside In Inside Out" in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p 147.

3. See for example John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983) and his forward to the twentieth anniversary edition of *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

4. See for example Natasha Gray "Bored With the Boys: Cracks in the Queer Coalition," *NYQ*, No. 26, April 26, 1992, pp. 26-30.

5. Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 46-47,49.

6. The phrase, of course, is from Fredric Jameson. See his "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 111-125, and "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July/August 1984), pp. 53-92.

7. I use the term "queer nation" with small letters to differentiate the concept from the direct action group with the name Queer Nation (with capital letters). The two are not the same thing and should not be mistakenly conflated.
8. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Cohn Gordon, trans. Cohn Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 98.
9. Manthia Diawara, "The Absent One: The Avant-Garde and the Black Imaginary in *Looking For Langston*," *Wide Angle*, Vol. 13, Nos. 3 & 4, July-October 1991, p. 108.
10. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" in *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Ed. Mbye Chain (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992), p. 234.
11. Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukács" in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism*, ed. Fredric Jameson (New York: Verso, 1977), p. 85.
12. Edward Buscombe, "Ideas of Authorship" in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 23.
13. Charles Eckert, "The English Cine-structuralists" in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 155.
14. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 49.
15. Sometimes, if the film is a feature, it may be imported into the commercial film distribution market. However, its circulation is typically confined to what can be described as the "boutique" segment of that market-local theatres catering to a particular style of neighborhoods, porno successors to the art house theatre. Many of the films produced through this mode of production-short, non-feature length-are excluded under usual circumstances from entrance into the commercial market because that market has no economic use value for products of their form.
16. Andrea Weiss & Greta Schiller, *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, Inc., 1988), p. 14.
17. Kissing may ultimately not be so innocent as I have assumed. For example, when Gregg Araki's film, *The Living End*, was sent to a L.A. lab for VHS copies, the lab refused the order because it considered the film pornography, i.e., it dealt with homosexuality and showed two men kissing each other. For network TV concerns over showing a scene of two women kissing see Elizabeth Kolbert, "What's a Network TV Censor To Do?" *New York Times*, Vol. CXLII, Number 49, 340, May 23, 1993, Section 2, pp. 1, 31.
18. Werner Mittenzwei, "The Brecht-Lukács Debate" in *Preserve and Create: Essays in Marxist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gaylord C. LeRoy and Ursula Beitz (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), p. 216.
19. Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure* (London: British

Film Institute Publishing, 1980), p. 77.

20. Eugene Lunn, "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács" *New German Critique*, Vol. 1, no. 3, Fall 1974, pp. 15, 43.

21. Based on conversation with John Greyson, August 1993.

22. Bertolt Brecht, *Edward II: A Chronicle Play*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966), p. 41.

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Mandabi

Character, context, and Wolof language

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In 1969 some ten years after most francophone African countries became independent, African cineastes met in Ouagadougou for the first Festival of African Cinema. In July of the same year, the instigators of this event created the Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI) in Algiers. From its very inception this organization sought to distance itself from Hollywood's escapist filmmaking tradition, the Indian film industry's romantic tradition, and the no less escapist French tradition of thrillers with actors such as Jean Paul Belmondo and Catherine Deneuve. FEPACI's aim was to create films aesthetically grounded in the various African ethnic modes of artistic creation [1][[open notes in new window](#)] while critically fostering the virtues of nationhood and panafricanism. Ideologically, the films were to be decidedly anti-colonial, didactic and pregnant with options for the challenges fronting the newly independent nations (*African Cinema* 41).[2]

Characteristically, such works were to value the African context in a way that Western anthropological films were never able or willing to do. The filming of traditional African villages, the presence of men and women with a different skin color and various non metropolitan language patterns would no longer be used to assert Western hegemonic values, but to act as the incubators and motivators of the actions of men and women eager to assume their destiny. Similarly, such actions were no longer to be construed as ahistorical gestures, performed without any sense of their impact on the lives of others but as signs and factors of an undaunted resolve to reject subservience and build a future free from injustice and sociopolitical impositions.

This paper will concentrate on MANDABI (1968) and argue that in its characterization and use of language, it maps Ousmane Sembène's social concerns, sketches his mandate as a cineaste in post-colonial Africa and breathes life into the ideals of the FEPACI charter.

A bilingual film (Wolof/French), the first internationally acclaimed African film, MANDABI has usually been regarded as an exposé of bureaucratic red tape in a newly independent African state (*African Cinema from A to Z*, p. 164, *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène*, p. 127). A model of postcolonial double critique, MANDABI swiftly moves away from the manichean dichotomy inherent in the nationalist

creed (us vs. them) to locate itself within an ideological space bounded by "citizenship," legality, democratic entitlements and traditional status in post-colonial Africa.[3] To this aim, it pits the new bourgeoisie against the illiterate majority, Islamic hustlers against the common people, male against female, and finally it details the ideological implications of the dichotomy between official language (French) and everyday medium of communication (Wolof, Bainbara, Moth).

In 1968, four novels and two collections of short stories had already established Ousmane Sembène as a major francophone African writer.[4] His most celebrated characters (Bakayoko, Oumar) were known to "challenge the apparent order of things" (*African Novels* 82) in the name of social justice, although through much personal sacrifice, emotional ambivalence and often isolation from their peers.

MANDABI's Jeng, like many of Ousmane Sembène's characters, is a type.[5] He wears many tokens of the condition ascribed to him ("borom kër") without fully shouldering any of the responsibilities. He dresses, eats and sleeps like an authentic Wolof family man, but the expression "rightful polygamous man" would describe him best.[6] For even though he may be the progenitor of the children in the yard, his status as a father is much invalidated. Jeng is most often absent; at no time in the movie is he seen talking to any of the children in the house or actually mentioning them by name. In fact, Sembène seems more eager to emphasize the extent to which Méty and Aram act as mothers and father for these children, since the two women not only look after their feeding but also every other aspect of their lives. Jeng, when he is home from the city, receives attributes of comfort from his wives, most often without having to ask for these. He occasionally screams at his spouses for infringing on his prerogatives as the "man of the house" and thanks them for feeding him to his satisfaction.

Jeng's spatial movements assume a straight direction, unlike his wives whose roundabout walks in the compound allows constant interaction with the children. Jeng's usual itinerary takes him from his bedroom to the city via, occasionally, the rudimentary toilet at the back of the house (mbag gacce). Poor, polygamous and pompous, he teeters between the abyss of humiliation and the eeriness of neat appearance. Yet, or perhaps because of such conditions, he is trapped within his traditional role, compelled to stand to his gender in the midst of his wives and children but reduced to silence at the hands of young — therefore insignificant — civil servants. Jeng knows the male's traditional role, and through parsimony of words, stem looks and a confident gait, Jeng acts it convincingly in private. However, in public, neocolonial, "francophone" Senegal, any ability that he used to have has been rendered meaningless and inappropriate. Unemployed and unable to provide for his family, social ineptitude is a constant threat. As circumstances force him to rely on his wives' resourcefulness, he saves face by maintaining an air of self-confidence all the while.

Viewed from a traditional Wolof grid, Jeng's "maleness" is cracked by habits and acts not usually associated with manliness, whether it is in the very first scene of the film where the gentle coddling of a well-shaven face provides him with the utmost pleasure, in the scene with Méty (his second wife) where his feet are caressingly washed after a long day of walking through the city. Even in the scene where like a glutton, he is feasting on his lunch, Jeng displays a propensity for

personal gratification and luxury, which is the source of comic relief. This comedy eventually undermines whatever external signs of authority he may want to be identified with later on.[7] in addition, none of these delights are of Jeng's whole making. Unable to feed his family, he deftly positions himself at the receiving end of these enjoyments and is wise enough not to inquire about their origin.

In comparison to his wives, Jeng is but another version of the children to whom he pays so little attention. He is fed, helped to swallow his food and lulled to sleep like the latter (cf. scene of Aram pressing his feet before he falls off to sleep). His wardrobe is looked after by his wives and finally at the end of the film. It is his wives who find the arguments expedient enough to shield him from the profiteers in the "goxx" or district. Jeng, for all intents and purposes is an innocent adult parading like a man in the city and being victimized for such a dare. MANDABI, therefore, is as much a critique of male absenteeism and male egotistic pleasure-seeking as it is a scathing indictment of triumphant nationalism's broken promises.

MANDABI takes every opportunity to critique begging, now raised to a normal code of behavior among people whose ancestors prided themselves in rejecting any humiliation. Sembène condemns it in both its religious (Yalwaan) and secular form (Saraxu). Yelwaan, in Wolof, is the religious act of requesting alms (zakat), in the name of Allah. For the giver, it provides peace of mind that Allah's teachings have been honored. The recipient, who may or may not be indigent, gains an opportunity to humble his/herself and acknowledge the "creator." [8] Thus, Islam and religiosity are the appropriate context within which "yelwaan" takes place and acquires the meaning intended by the Qu'ran. In the absence of such grounding, it becomes nothing less than gift offering on vague humanitarian basis. "Saraxu," on the other hand, entails shamelessly surrendering one's agency to another in order to be the beneficiary of that person's worldly kindness. In a context which has traditionally valued personal honor (jom), such a practice seems both self depreciating and self denigrating. We will now examine both types of begging as represented in MANDABI. Through their critique, Sembène suggests that in such conditions of material deprivation, Islam is but a front unscrupulously used by some individuals to defraud others.

Born and raised in a Wolof and predominantly Islamic tradition, Jeng gives alms to those poorer than he. Yet, the viewer readily surmises that Jeng is not motivated to perform such acts through respect for the holy scriptures alone. Nowhere in the film does he display a religious zeal similar to the jallobé characters waking up to Samba Diallo's dramatic incantations in *L'aventure ambiguë*. Alms giving, in MANDABI is a secular activity, performed daily, but only when the giver's immediate needs have been fulfilled and in places where light-heartedness or the prospect thereof is not too far away. Whenever Jeng performs such actions, he does so with the hope of shielding himself and his family from possible misfortune.

Jeng's religiosity is highly questionable. He sleeps past the "jumaa" (friday community prayers) time and zealously compensates for this shortcoming by hustling his sleeping wives into paying tribute to Allah:

"Well, look at this! the minute your stomachs are full, you think of nothing but sleep. Have you forgotten Allah?! Let me tell you one thing. Non-believers do not stay in this house of mine. Where do you think I get the money that allows me to feed you? I have just walked my feet off

and you know that I have not worked for the last four years. Today is Friday and nobody woke me up. This is embarrassing even to me."

In the nine days which span the action, he is never seen praying. Midway through this expiatory diatribe, Jeng strides towards the local toilet at the back of the compound with a kettle in his hand, presumably to purify himself and prepare for his prayers. Yet, not only is he exposed to the female nudity of his young wife (Aram) as he enters the toilet, but once he has cleansed himself and is alone in the room (praying?), she walks in with only a thin wet cloth as cover. Jeng, a few minutes later, is seen walking out, refreshed and clothed in his best attire. In the meantime, Aram is praying at the door of the room outside.

Supposing that Jeng did pray in the room, Islamic orthodoxy would have required of him that he purify himself a second time to conform to the ritual. As well, since the three of them (Jeng and his two wives) had missed juma together, Islam would dictate that they pray together under Jeng's guidance. None of this takes place. That Ibrahima fails to do this casts a shadow on his knowledge of the prayer ritual and eventually his ability to lead a family "dans le droit chemin de dieu"[9] (*L'appel des arènes* 70). Jeng walks out of the house nonplussed, as Méty runs after him to inform him about the money order notification brought by the mailman earlier in the day.

Yet, despite these proofs that he fails to strictly abide in Islamic precepts, Jeng actually gives alms to those beggars he thinks are in need. After the scene of the copious lunch, as he is about to fall asleep, one of his wives calls out to inform him that a beggar is at the door. Half asleep and heavy with food, Jeng wakes up, inquires about the age of the supplicant and orders his wife to give him the rest of the food. Similarly, later on in the movie, as he is approached by a woman claiming to be from the countryside and missing a bus fare, he presents her with the last bit of change that was in his pocket before proceeding to the bank. However, when the same person runs to him on his way back, with a similar request, a child on her back and pretending to be a poor single mother, Jeng reacts violently against the woman's ploy.

Jeng is the product of a society where Islam predominates. He has integrated some of the discursive idioms prevalent in it ("inch allah," "Allahu akbar"), would go to the mosque, would even occasionally rise early in the morning for the "fajhr" prayer, but Islam is not what informs his life. Such a claim is left to material deprivation and the pressing necessity to survive his four years of unemployment. As a consequence, even though the beggar or "yelwaankat" at the house might have been a Samba Diallo late in the day, Jeng was not responding to Islamic precepts when he granted his request. His generosity stemmed from genuine feelings of humanity and decency, not of religious duty. We may therefore conclude that the context that could found instances of "yelwaan" is lacking in MANDABI.

Furthermore, the film does not show the children usually seen in the streets of Dakar, Thies or Saint Louis begging for food under the disguise of religious devotion. In this film, begging is a generational activity confined to those born before or during colonial time. "Yelwaan," Sembène seems to suggest, cannot build the foundations of a future since it saps the spirit and depletes the will of those who indulge in it. It kills principles and compromises the mind. It negates any possibility for human beings assuming themselves in the future. Finally, it

transforms characters such as the imam and his retinue of idle followers into permanent fixtures of the "goxx."

Indeed, in the absence of a genuine Islamic context, this latter group oscillates between hypocrisy and greed. The imam (Iliman or Seriñ) is no more religious than Jeng. He is seen telling beads at several instances in the movie. However, unlike the imam in CEDDO who scrupulously leads his followers through the five daily prayers, Seriñ makes it known that it is time for prayers but is never shown praying. We see him dressed like a devout Muslim, articulating lines of the Qu'ran with Arabic-sounding phonetic features, but skillfully plotting to take money and goods away from Jeng. Seriñ is a satirical figure, stripped of sanctity, "reduced to the level of an ordinary mortal person" (Cham 1991) and despised by Méty and Aram for his Tartuffe-like devotion. For him and his followers (talibés), religion functions as a cover under which they compete with the store owner (Mbarka) to empty Jeng's pockets. More than any other characters in the film, they epitomize instances of "saraxu." They seem to recoil at nothing and would stoop to any level to take something from others, provided imploring alone is involved.

With the exception of the unidentified woman on the way to bank, all the characters who make "saraxu" their mainstay are male and adult. Their posture includes submission, subdued looks, arms pointing downwards, folded legs — so that their approach seems non confrontational, deferring to some imagined superiority of the other. They shake hands solicitously, wear contrite faces, adopt a tone of voice suggesting complaint against forces greater than themselves. They finally move their bodies from an upright to a bent position, forcing their interlocutor to look down on them, commiserate with their plight and feel obliged to satisfy their request, if only partially.

Early in the film, as Jeng walks out of Mbarka's store on his way to the post office, Sow runs to him, like a child would toward another who has a much desired toy. Goaded by the lure of money and rice, he deftly ingratiates himself with a visibly annoyed Jeng. Not unlike Mor Lam, an irritated Jeng held in check only by the traditional Wolof value of restraint (kercé), responds unenthusiastically to Sow's salamalecs before asking him bluntly:

D: Well, where are you heading to?

S: Ah, I am coming with you!

Jeng, even though not much better off than his counterpart, is too proud, much too fearful of the ungrateful rumors in the "goxx" should he reject the latter's company. At the post office, however, things seem to stabilize somewhat as Jeng uses his friends subservience to keep his spot on the line-up while the public writer translates Abdu's letter for him.

By so willfully offering his services and surrendering his agency to Jeng, Sow had granted to his neighbor the right to use and abuse him without any recourse. Such unconditional alienation of oneself in the hands of another human being, however powerful, institutes a slave-master relationship between the two men. Meek looking and willfully apathetic, Sow is later utilized by an astute Jeng as a shield against the rage of the public writer claiming his due, and as chaperone to restore his neat appearance once the irate public writer has loosened his grip on his collar. Indeed in this scene, the more serious Jeng looks, the meeker Sow; the more

threatened, the more worried the latter, finally, the happier the former, the happier still the latter. With no counterpart labor to offer, Sow stands at the total mercy of a confused and beleaguered Jeng. Jeng's lack of ingrained cynicism is all that deters outright abuse and humiliation of Sow.

Sow, however, is but a more mundane and perhaps more humane version of Iliman. The latter's class pretences would forbid him from following Jeng to the various administrative offices Jeng has been instructed to visit to obtain the documents requested by the police. Yet, Iliman's profiteering tactics resembles his disciple's. Like a hunter at dawn, Iliman corners Jeng at his house at breakfast time (a most unwelcome time to be asking money from anybody in Wolof society) and with much religious formulae introduces his request. As Iliman is turned down, he swallows part of Jeng's breakfast and leaves Jeng's compound just in time to avoid the embarrassment of being witness to Majañ's drastic plight.

Indeed at times, the religious dignitaries in MANDABI appear like everyday hustlers dressed, speaking and moving like devout Muslims. They associate neither with a mosque nor a Juuma, are neither family men nor even seem married. Always moving in a group, they seem afraid of their own individuality and find comfort only in the anonymous pool of gregariousness. Sensuality, however, is familiar to them. Iliman, throughout the film, cleans his ears with a feather and is hardly able to keep his eyes open or hold his head straight for the sheer enjoyment of this act.

The social praxis of religion is shown as much vitiated in Sembène's novels, as well as in MANDABI. Here, Islam is confined to a series of discursive and social attitudes, none of which manage to resolve the predicament of the characters or bring them solace. At worst, Islam functions like the "jarbaat" Mbaye's European car, Italian cut attire, and French accent. They are but colonial artifacts adopted for the aim of defrauding those who have never been privy to the places these originated from. I concur with Cham (1991) that Sembène's movies "systematically undermine Islam. But...only to the extent that Sembène shows Islamic practice as the hustling mode of various character types." Cham, however, justifiably notes that Ousmane Sembène still has to create a positive Islamic character, one who acts on dogma's precepts, assumes his duty as a social being and actually brings concrete solutions to the economic and ideological difficulties of most mosque goers.

Begging, then, whatever forms it may take, whatever orthodoxy it may buffer itself with, undermines the agency of its practitioners. It saps one's will power and creates dependency since only sustained individual action anchored in one's political conditions can guarantee one's emotional and psychological permanent well being.

MANDABI is a germinal film, heralding XALA, CAMP DE THIAROYE and lately GUELEWAR. In all these films, those who refuse to receive crumbs acquire hero status. In MANDABI this is Abdu, the migrant worker from Senegal, eking out a living by cleaning the streets in Paris. His name in Arabic means "slave." But slavery is precisely what Jeng's "jarbaat" flees from when he discreetly joins millions of his friends in the city of lights and the Eiffel Tower, but also of cold pavements and untrustworthy postal service. Abdu, unlike Serin and his followers (talibés), has chosen exile and indeed social alienation (*Cinema* 129) rather than

the humiliating daily spectacle of a stifled life. Between growing into a professional swindler, like the self-appointed intercessor at the bank, and becoming a marginalized African in the metropole, Abdu has opted for the latter. This choice allows him to keep his integrity where it matters most, among his uncles and aunts back home. The content of the letter accompanying the money order reveals this:

"Dear uncle: This is Abdu writing to inquire about you and the family, and asking whether you are in peace...I have come to this country so that I may find work and earn some money. I left Ndakaru because there is no work there. And it is impossible for me to be sitting each day that the creator makes, each year that the creator makes without work, waiting for some crumbs or for somebody to give me alms. I am a grown up man, who should have a house, a family, and control his destiny..."

Abdu refuses aid when it means having to be content with the crumbs of others whoever they may be, whatever their motivation. Such refusal however, as in the case of Diouana in *LA NOIRE DE...*, Joom Galle in *LE DERNIER DE L'EMPIRE*, indeed in *GUELEWAR*, entails sacrifice. Abdu, in the metropole, faces a life where his presence is tolerated only in secluded buildings, a life where his presence in public immediately creates a halo of space around him, a life where finally he has become an ideal candidate for police pick ups, prison and mental illness. The sequence showing him sitting alone and pensive in the subway swishing past the Eiffel tower symbolizes a predicament that Désiré Ecaré described in *CONCERTO POR UN EXIT*, (1968) and which Med Hondo fully articulated in *LES BICOTS NEGRES, VOS VOISINS* (1970).

Méty, Jeng's first wife, also refuses to beg. Her character is reminiscent of Ramatoulaye in *Les bouts de bois de dieu*. Female and illiterate, her space is limited to her house, her activities to the raising of her children. But her code of behavior far outweighs the imam's or even her husband's declarations. Resolute, she snatches whatever food she needs for her children from Mbarka as soon as she hears news of the money order. Uncompromising, she forces Aram to face up to her acts when she reminded her of the debts Aram had contracted since the arrival of the money order notification. Méty cowers down when Jeng, in an attempt to regain his much-jeopardized manhood, screams at them. But in all practical matters, Méty remains the foundations of the household and Jeng knows it.

She refuses to succumb to social pressure whenever she would have to make up for men's idleness or offer her husband a way out of his predicament by assuming the blame for it. Méty, after Jeng receives a beating at the photo studio, announces to everybody that her husband had been mugged and the money order stolen. Sembène, however, seems to lift any cloud of immorality for such a lie. Indeed, as Jeng himself utters between sobs in the final scene of the film, where lies and immorality have become the norm, a lie cannot be immoral when used to combat dishonesty and fraud.

Finally, perhaps the most explicit rejection of begging as a *modus vivendi* emanates from Jeng himself. On the second encounter with the begging woman, on his way from the bank, Jeng grabs the woman's shoulders and shakes her in disbelief. As this character walks away, he muses to himself:

D: If begging has become a trade, where is the country heading to?

Critics are prompt to mention that MANDABI is Sembène's first feature film entirely shot in Wolof and French. Whereas this may be an important fact in his development as a cineaste, in fact, MANDABI could not have been shot entirely in French as *LA NOIRE DE...* had been. In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to examine ways in which, Ousmane Sembène makes the case of Wolof — and other African languages — as a language which can sustain credible film characters.

MANDABI is the film about the unsuspecting disenfranchised to whom Sembène throws an ideological jumpstart. As celebrations of the new nation's birth die down, this film reveals how the bastions of privilege continue, when the nationalists had promised a state where right, not color or birthright would be the deciding factor. The post office, the police, indeed the entire government — by the sheer fact of accepting the former colonizer's language, in a country where close to 60% of the population could neither read nor write in French — set the very conditions whereby citizenship and the rights concurrent with it would elude most.

Sembène pointedly pits those who enjoy some proficiency in French against those who do not. Systematically, the ability to function in the former colonizer's language bestows the right to cheat, abuse, and lie. In the best of circumstances, French lets people hide in residential districts, cleft away from the medina by paved roads, bright lights, brick walls and metallic gates. Even the public writer at the post office, the epitome of bilingualism at the service of the illiterate majority, ends up abusing Jeng. Among themselves, those who are literate in French abuse each other back and forth, as seen in the scene at the post office between employees, or between the customer who took up Jeng's defense and the clerk. Sembène goes even further. Mbarka, the buffoon-like character usually derided by children, looked down upon by the likes of Jeng and often pestered by female customers, paradoxically enough speaks Wolof with a French accent and abuses his customers profusely. Similarly, both at Amath's house and at Mbaye's house, the use of French carries with it a terseness which the Wolof conversation does not suggest. French, it seems, is a perverse and perversion-mongering language. It bears in it the historical mark of violence which even the departure of colonial administrators cannot wipe out.[10] Under these circumstances, the use of Wolof in film is, indeed, a sobering advent.

Jeng, no doubt, curses his wives in Wolof, fights the public writer in that language and rejects the woman imploring his generosity on his way home from the bank. Yet, the few light moments he enjoys are also experienced in this language. These categorizations may sound simplistic, but they illustrate a valid socio-linguistic feature of French and English in the former colonies in the period immediately following the granting of independence. For the majority of Africans, the French language was still a "chasse gardée." [11] And for the few who were proficient in it, their competence lacked a wide register; they knew the formal registers more than the informal ones.[12]

Dampened in his spirits, sore in his feet and sweating under his "bubu," Jeng manages to keep his critical faculties alert. The imposition of French as the official language may marginalize him, but he does not fail, albeit grudgingly, to brandish his voting card and his taxation notice. In 1969, he probably would have been totally excluded from electoral campaigns, fought in French, and told how to vote

by a local dignitary in the "goxx." Jeng steadfastly refuses to transform his "home" (kër) into an expendable real estate item, the value of which is decided by market forces that exclude him. Thus, he still maintains an internal reserve of strength, articulated by his resolve to resist humiliation and dishonor even in instances where, as in the scene with the public writer, his arguments may be on shaky grounds.

With such psychological predisposition, Jeng would have been a less than credible character had French been his medium of communication. Wolof becomes his natural medium, for in this language he plots his meanings effectively and efficiently. In one scene, Mbarka agrees to lend him fifteen kilograms of rice. However, as he is about to leave the store, the shopkeeper signals him to come and withdraw the rice on his return from the post office. Alerted, Jeng who had not informed his interlocutor of his destination suggests that perhaps it would be better if one of his children came for the goods immediately:

"M: I have put aside fifteen kilograms for you.

D: Aah!

M: Ah no! I cannot give you more than that. Stop by to pick it up on your way from the post office.

D: All right! give it to my children when you see one of them."

Jeng even pushes the dare further by requesting bus fare from Mbarka, on credit. In the film, Jeng is trapped, bullied around but never taken in in situations where the only asset of the speaker is his discursive competence in Wolof. In the following scene, he outwits a suspicious Sow who, weary of the rumors of the loss of the money order, expresses his surprises and indirectly accuses Jeng of selfishness:

"Sow: As far I am concerned, the rumors of the theft are surprising.

Jeng: So goes the world these days. Nobody trust anybody anymore, for moral rectitude has become a thing of the past.

S: We should all put our grains in the same basket so as to have at least one basket.

J: But if all the grains put together cannot fill a basket, there will still be a basket.

S: Nowadays, it is very difficult to gather enough.

J: Aah!, that is right but you can be sure that water will never, never, never rise (on its own) or return where it originated from."

Riddle for riddle, Jeng systematically turns his interlocutor's ambiguous insinuations against the latter. He first rejects the doubt cast on Méty's story that he, Jeng, had been mugged by questioning the faith Sow has in Jeng and his wives. Discovering his blunder, Sow redirects his remarks towards the need for community solidarity. But here again, Jeng, broken to this type of esoteric language, suggests that such solidarity implies that everybody, whatever their material fortune, contribute their assets. Finally, as Sow loses his metaphorical bent and reverts to literal language to hint at how difficult times have become, Jeng rejects his implied plea for assistance by saying what both of them know: whatever assistance he might give Sow will be his loss forever. As Jeng utters the last word of his Wolof proverb, he firmly walks away from his friend already swept out of the camera field.

Jeng's positioning in Wolof makes perhaps Sembène's most eloquent point about needing to valorize national African languages to empower the disenfranchised. In his own language, Jeng is a sound and whole human being. Patriarchy is his lot (Kindem & Steele 1991), but he is neither dupe, nor ignorant, nor irrational, nor unfamiliar with dialogic discursive strategies. Thus, even if the overriding use of French as the official language — at the post office, the police station, the bank — has shut him out, it has not destroyed his humanity.

Jeng, Sembène seems to suggest, is an unknown quantity which the establishment wants to keep in this position for its own sake. To this extent, direct exhortation of the mailman to stand up against the new bourgeoisie's abuses indicate the first step towards liberation. Including Méty and Aram in this exhortation recognizes that genuine change can only come through uncompromised class and gender alliances. The fact remains, however, that within such alliances, women will need to make sure that sexism and patriarchy are combated with the same vigor as economic exploitation and institutional exclusion.

MANDABI presents the trite story of a money order gone amiss, but more importantly, it offers an ideological and artistic mandate. It features downtrodden people as the real agents of change, shows a credible resolute and purposeful Méty, and pushes questions about the future of the country and its citizens. Lastly, it provides an artistic creation grounded in its characters' historical context and which turns their conditions into a center within the margin. In this light, FEPACI hailed it as the epitome of its social agenda.

Furthermore, MANDABI provides a programmatic synopsis of Sembene's films. The issue of polygamy, peering in the background will inform the action of XALA; Méty's strength and determination against the ploys of the imam herald the character of Princess Dior in CEDDO; finally, Abdu's refusal to accept aid that would debase his humanity announces GUELEWAR.

NOTES

1. Thus, oral narrative structures, typological protagonists, long and two shots tend to be frequently used by African filmmakers. See Diawara, Manthia, "Oral Literature and African Film: Narratology in WEND KUNI," *Présence Africaine* No. 142 (1987); Petty, Sheila, "African Cinema and (Re)-education: Using Recent African Feature Films," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 20:2 (summer 1992).

2. "La charte d'Alger du cinéma africain" after having defined cinéma as a "moyen d'éducation, d'information et de prise de conscience" (a tool for education, information and political awareness) proposes to revert the "situation de domination et d'extraversion culturelle" (the situation of cultural extroverted-ness and alienation) which so characterized African societies in 1975. Neither an aloof intellectual, nor a lonely artist, the filmmaker is in turn ascribed griot-like features and the duty to articulate "les besoins et les aspirations populaires et non ceux des groupes d'intérêt particuliers" (the needs and aspirations of the people rather than those of particular interest groups).

3. In an interview with Françoise Pfaff, Ousmane Sembène describes the action of MANDABI as follows:

"He (Jeng) is caught in a situation that goes beyond him because he has always thought that he was, as Ibrahima Jeng, a personality in his own neighbourhood where everybody knows him. But as he goes out of his own traditional culture, he goes to a modern culture where the identity card has nothing to do with internal autonomy within a group where he was not an anonymous person. Out of his culture, he becomes an anonymous person." (*The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène* 127)

As Jeng faces the "modern" state apparatus alone, MANDABI sows the seed of a tragedy avoided only with the intervention of the mailman at the end of the film. In contrast, an episode related by Anthony Appiah in his recent *In My Father's House* illustrates ways in which a group of Ghanaians caught in the same post-colonial predicament as Jeng sought to maintain their status in the modern world by "undercut(ing) the formal legal system" (10).

4. Ousmane Sembène's novels include the following: *Le Docker noir*, Paris: Debresse, 1956; *O pays, mon beau peuple*, Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1957; *Les bouts de bois de dieu*, Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960; *Voltaïque*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962; *L'harmattan*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1964; *Le mandat précédé de Véhi ciosane*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966.

5. Character typage, according to William Van Wert is one of the exponents of social realism, acting like a "motivating monkey" to impress its message on the spectators:

"Ideologically speaking, typage allows the spectator to easily identify the characters at the same time that it prevents him from identifying with those characters." (Van Wert, 212).

African audiences in Dakar and Ouagadougou readily empathize with Jeng's plight as they extensively amuse themselves at his antics at home with his wives, and his pompous airs in public.

6. However, satire of polygamy is very mild in this film. For, unlike XALA where a puzzled El Hadji is buffeted between the recriminations of the "badiène," the demands of his second wife and the silent rebuke of his first wife, Jeng's wives are much like mother figures to him. They feed, clothe and comfort him without requesting anything in exchange for their efforts.

7. Local Senegalese audiences, most of whom are illiterate and thus in a potential similar position vis-à-vis the administration as Jeng, respond with roars of laughter at such scenes. Some even go as far as loudly taunting Jeng and commenting on his attitudes while the film is showing.

8. Analyzing Aminata Sow Fall's *La Grève des battu*, Cham (1991) perceives the novel as a plea against "the distortion of this principle by individuals" and for the "respect of the true ideals of zakat."

9. "In god's rightful ways."

10. Assia Djebar deals with this very issue in her *L'amour, la fantasia*, Paris: J. C. Lattès, 1985. For her, a writer who has never renounced the use of French, the

issue is one of re-coding this language in such a way as to dislodge from it the embedded violence it has been fed over centuries of male hegemony, three hundred years of slave trading and over a century of colonialism.

11. "The private domain of the elite."

12. See Béti, Mongo, "La langue française survivra t-elle à Senghor," *Komparatistische Heft* 1, 1980,

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Sango Malo. Ta Dona

Returning to the African village

by Jonathan Haynes

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History has imposed the clash of the traditional and the modern as an inevitable theme of African cinema as of its literature.^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) The classic form of this theme presents the journey of a young hero from village to city, a motif that never wears out because it keeps being repeated in social and psychological experience. In the modern, urban^[2] art forms of film and novel the village is looked back to, as the place left, in moods of nostalgia (Toureh, 134), guilt or anger. Often the story concerns expulsion or chosen exile: a conflict which may not be historical in itself precipitates the hero out of his or her village. The obvious, inevitable, inexhaustible way to figure this is as a collision of young love and a repressive social system: An example is *LE WAZZOU POLYGAME* of Oumarou Ganda (Niger, 1970), in which a young woman is sold into marriage to a rich polygamist by her parents. In the aftermath of the ensuing catastrophe, her lover takes a truck to Ghana as a labor migrant, and she goes to the city and becomes a bargirl.

In other cases the different consciousness of the young is precisely the issue: perhaps the best example of this is *DJELI*, by Fadika Kramo-Lanciné (Ivory Coast, 1981), in which a romance begun at the University of Abidjan encounters fierce opposition in the lovers' native village, where their unequal caste status (his father was her father's praise singer) makes their union unthinkable. The film conveys with unparalleled force what it is to have one's family ranged against one, with an abyss of consciousness and feeling between. One might say *DJELI* deals with returning to the village, not leaving it — the lovers are home during the school holidays — though where "home" really is now becomes one of the questions they have to grapple with.

In any case one might oversimplify suggestively by saying that for a generation or two the movement has been from the village to the city.^[3] Now a new generation of filmmakers, of whom Fadika Kramo-Lanciné is a forerunner, is exploring a return to the village, trying to get beyond the classic form of the conflict. For their generation the problem is not escape, but establishing a working relation with the village. Born roughly at the moment of Independence, their experience does not correspond to the colonial manichean binary opposition of Black and White, colonizer and colonized. The developmentalist binary of the first phase of nation-building, tradition/ modernity, while still very much present, has been complicated

by issues such as the indigenization of the forms of state control, and all the forms of postcolonial "hybridity." In real life in contemporary Africa, as Jean-Francois Bayart says, people are constantly straddling the modern and the traditional, probably without a clear sense of their boundaries. Even the territorial binary of village and city has tended to break down, as is evidenced by such phenomena as the continued active involvement of city dwellers in the affairs of their ancestral villages, frequent retirements to the village after a working life in the city, diffusion of urban styles to the villages, or the "ruralization" of city slums (Bayart, 12, and see the literature he cites).

But our postmodern sophistication about binaries, constructed essentialisms, and the invention of tradition should not blind us to the extent to which such contradictions are still lived and felt. As Terence Ranger points out in his seminal essay "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," just because traditions can be shown to have been invented does not mean that they do not take on historical reality (212). The processes of modernization grind away, in spite of economic collapse, with the familiar alienations they entail. Global evolutions in media technologies increase the bombardment of Africa by images from outside, giving renewed urgency to the project of keeping an "authentic," "traditional" African culture in view as a point of reference. The fact that most African film production is funded at least partly with European money complicates the issue (Diawara, Ukadike, Okome and Haynes).

In what follows I will explore the contemporary state of the theme of returning to the village by looking at four films, all made about 1990, and all of them first features by directors who were in their 30s.

The two simplest examples, both from Burkina Faso, have exactly opposed positions. *MA FILLE NE SERA PAS EXISÉ (MY DAUGHTER WILL NOT BE EXCISED)*, directed by Boureima Nikiema, begins with Dr. Abdou loading his family into their car in Ouagadougou for a weekend back in their village. Once there, they discover a problem more serious than his wife's having forgotten the malaria pills. Dr. Abdou's father, the customary chief of the village, insists that Abdou's daughter Nafi go through the traditional initiation, which includes circumcision and excision of the clitoris. Dr. Abdou's refusal to permit this scandalizes the village elders, affronts his father's prestige as customary chief, and endangers his own succession to that role.

The center of the film is a public debate held to resolve the conflict, in which Dr. Abdou employs posters and horrible medical photographs, and the authority of modernizing propaganda broadcast on the radio. He is supported by an old man who fought in the French Army, by the local schoolteachers and the midwives, and he calls in a trio of religious authorities — a Muslim imam, Protestant pastor, and Catholic curé — to attest that the holy books never enjoin female circumcision. Against this alliance of progressive forces are ranged the village elders, on the one hand, whose argument for the social benefits of initiation (if not of circumcision) is illustrated sympathetically by the camera in a long, digressive, non-diegetic sequence, and, on the other hand, the fetish priests, who claim that the ancestors still insist on excision, although the oracles have in fact said no such thing — since if there are no circumcisions, how will the fetish priests eat?

Finally an attempt to excise screaming Nafi by force is thwarted in the nick of time

by the police, but not before the wicked fetish priest's only daughter has bled to death from her excision. Faced with this providential evidence, Dr. Abdou's father joins with the villagers in rejecting the practice of female circumcision.

Artistically crude and technically primitive, the film must nevertheless be effective propaganda. The very technical deficiencies which mark it as not of export quality point to its practical commitment to the village setting where, projected outdoors with portable equipment, it will change people's minds on a practical matter, part of the modernization of village life undertaken by the Burkinabé government, which must inevitably clash with traditional customs. The government of Burkina Faso is well known for having the most committed and successful film policy in Africa, producing both feature films of high aesthetic quality designed for export (by Idrissa Ouédraogo, Gaston Kaboré, Pierre Yameogo, and others), and a mass of (mostly documentary) films directly involved with the work of social transformation, like this one (which is listed as a "docu-fiction" in the *Dictionnaire du cinéma africain*, 53).

In contrast, the consciously beautiful cinematography of Drissa Touré's LAADA gives it its main claim on an international audience. If it is also a morality play about tradition and modernity (the title means "customary law"), the values have become reversed. It tells the story of three young men from a village. Two go to the city, where they become gangsters, while the third remains to farm and be initiated into the traditional culture. The film troops piously after a group of initiates as they are given lessons in the medicinal properties of plants, perform magical sacrifices, and watch a fetish priest munch burning charcoal. Our hero is also being taught to read, less successfully, by his younger brother.

Things are changing in the countryside. "Times are hard" are about the first words we hear spoken. And a radio broadcast on improving agricultural techniques accompanies some of the first establishing shots of the village. But, the film asserts, things have not fallen apart, the center is holding. The initiation is into a still viable world view, and the village council is still sovereign in deciding to reintegrate one of the returned prodigals while the other is found guilty of murder. But this assertion of integrity seems willed rather than realized. The film reverently deals with tradition rather than forming a living part of it, as for instance Souleymane Cissé's YEELLEN seems to do. LAADA can't help being ethnographic towards its material, calling attention to traditional-ness rather than simply accepting it as the way things are done. It puts the villagers' culture on display in narrative and discursive forms like those developed by Western anthropology and related discourses.[4]

These two tendencies — which we might call "political" and "culturalist," following Ferid Boughedir (52-55) have more sophisticated exemplars, Bassek Ba Kobhio's SANGO MALO (Cameroun), and the Malian Adama Drabo's TA DONA.[5]

Malo is a young schoolteacher, just out of the teacher's college in Yaoundé, who comes to a small village in the rain forest. The village is dominated by a backward, traditional elite, complacent and corrupt in its power. The director of the school is a disciplinarian, whose mission is to force children into unnatural postures, physical and mental. The curriculum he teaches is left over from the colonial period and addresses no real need except his own for an occasion to dominate. The children's families are exploited by an arrogant shopkeeper, who charges what he

likes because his is the only shop in town. The village chief sits on his porch in his tee-shirt, with a pretty young wife half or maybe a third his age, having his feet massaged. The village catechist declares that all of this is good.

Malo is an idealist, and a radical, and he sets out to transform the village, beginning with the school curriculum. Instead of an imported, irrelevant intellectual discipline, he takes his students out into the fields, to teach them to be useful citizens — which means intelligent farmers, unashamed to be doing manual work, and in touch with the creative potential of their own labor. Back in the classroom Malo introduces politics and (when he himself falls in love) sex education. His work bears fruit, and leads to confrontations. The kids riot against the shopkeeper. By the time the director has engineered his dismissal from his teaching post, Malo has established a farmers' cooperative, and he stays to direct it.

All this is didactic enough, the clear and intelligent expression of the current progressive agenda for Africa, a more fundamental politics than the agitation for multiparty democracy, which was shaking political superstructures across the continent at the time the film was being made.

Set against the film's political message is its sense for character. SANGO MALO is strongly reminiscent of the Czech films of the 1960s in its humor. We don't hate the village oligarchy. We wonder at what droll monsters human beings can turn themselves into, and laugh with as well as at them. A fine visual wit and sometimes-inspired acting keep comedy spilling out. The camera is as much at home in the village as Malo is. Like him, the visual style finds the village to be a perfectly satisfactory sphere of activity, without sentimentalizing or condescending to it, or hunting up folkloric instances of "culture" (of which the film offers us none). It is an adequate world on a human scale, with rich greens and oranges to revel in, a simple decent vernacular architecture to organize space, and sometimes carefully organized shots of the villagers leading their collective life, streaming into the school or collecting for a meeting. The lively music on the soundtrack, by the eminent musician and musicologist (and writer) Francis Bebey, is both "rooted" and modern.

Malo's own character does not escape scrutiny,[6] and his story veers towards tragedy. The strength of character which makes him effective also makes him intolerant, with the intemperance of youth. He overreaches: he marries without paying a bride price or holding a celebration, because these customs don't fit with his ideas of love; but he sees his wife miserable, and his father-in-law destroyed as the result. And when he decides to chop down the sacred grove to farm it, because it's the only land in the village not privately owned, the other members of the cooperative — which he thinks of as "his" cooperative — desert him. Finally the village oligarchy has him arrested and the film leaves him in prison — a hero whose work remains but whose absence is not entirely unfortunate. As the director commented,[7] it is as if Sekou Touré had disappeared in the 1960s instead of staying on to turn into a despot. The film's form, which is the most conservative thing about it, centered as it is on the will of the lone male protagonist, thus turns back reflectively on itself.

But the counterweight to the political agenda is political tact and a humanistic study of character. The film does not offer a defense of the villagers' culture. It's a mistake to chop down the sacred grove and make a marriage in a way that causes

humiliation, but these are only tactical mistakes. The children are a source of cheerful anarchy, but like their peasant parents in the cooperative they remain a mass and do not articulate their own purposes. Dynamism, intelligence and will remain the preserve of Sango Malo and (as the ending promises) are his legacy.

In *TA DONA*, the director Adama Drabo has said,[8] he is trying to find an equilibrium between traditional African culture and the modern world. The film's hero, Sidy, can manage both cultures at once. His modern side bears a strong resemblance to Sango Malo. A young idealistic reformer, he comes to a village not as a schoolteacher but as an agent of the Forestry and Waters Ministry, to fight desertification. He intervenes to protect villagers from the depredations of corrupt government officials, and tries to institute policies that are genuinely appropriate to village conditions. The title (*FIRE!*) refers to the traditional peasant practice of setting brush fires. The government has outlawed this practice, in a sudden edict imposed through draconian coercive measures, contemptuous of the peasantry. Sidy wants to explain the rationality of the measure to them.

But he is not just a sympathetic, practical and welcomed modernizer. He is also learning from the people, as an initiate in the secret Bambara Society. As such he is tested, morally and spiritually, before secrets are made available to him.

The film shares his double consciousness, including scenes of the supernatural. Lots of African filmmakers understand how easily cinematic trickery can reproduce magical events. The problem is to make them imaginatively convincing, and here Adama Drabo succeeds better than, say, Drissa Touré in *LAADA*. The question of belief is posed directly in a scene where the chief has summoned the whole village — with crying children, bleating sheep and squawking chickens — to sit in the sun facing a calabash mounted on a tripod, in a rain making ceremony. The afternoon drags on, and Sidy asks the friend next to him if he really believes this will work. If Sidy doesn't believe it will, he's told peremptorily, he should leave. Later, of course, the calabash is struck by lightning and rain falls. What has been convincing is the relation of magical event to the psychology of the massed villagers.

The supernatural scenes are only the extreme instance of the film's myriad-mindedness. There is a staggering breadth of material in this movie, as if Drabo were trying to define the parameters of the Malian imagination, getting everything into one film. He can cut from a cabal of corrupt government officials sitting on heavy European furniture, dividing up heaps of ill-gotten lucre, to a line of peasant farmers tilling a field with hoes, in a collective rhythm, urged on by drummers and young women who walk down the line with calabashes of water — both scenes grasped with an insider's instinct. This aesthetic accomplishment is the best and imminent argument that it is indeed possible to manage both cultures at once.

But the film is not perfect, and does not always manage to contain its centrifugal force. It tells many stories at once. While the plot connections and transitions are carefully planned, and both script and direction show a knack for quick, revelatory social comedy, the film is dizzying and may be hard to follow on first viewing.

Another and finally dominant strand of the plot concerns Sidy's relationship with Koro, daughter of a corrupt government Deputy. One would expect a classic conflict between the girl's father and her reforming young lover, but the father is distracted by an Anti-Corruption Brigade, which hauls him into their Dantesque

offices for questioning and — as the film ends — arrests him. Meanwhile the girl's mother is sick with a mysterious illness. Her husband's Europeanized friends want to have her sent to Europe for tests, but it is Sidy who will save her by reaching the end of his spiritual quest for the seventh *canarie* — the final healing property of a certain herb. His quest takes him to an ancient Dogon woman, who gives him the recipe but dies before she has told him the dosage. Back in the city, the dosage is worked out by modern medical science, in an exemplary instance of the successful management and cooperation of Mali's two cultures, traditional secret wisdom being made available for universal rational use.

The film's weaknesses show around this part of the story, and not merely because it descends into allegory. The bourgeoisie Koro is never questioned as the natural object of desire, in spite of the corrupt source of her money. And Sidy is obviously going to marry her and be assimilated into her class. The ending makes it clear he will replace her father as redeemed symbol of the new Malian ruling class. But this is too easy. The film has scenes which take the measure of the corruption, arrogance and incompetence of the government of Moussa Traoré. But it pretends the government could clean itself up through an anti-corruption campaign[9]. And it assumes that Sidy's goodness can in itself solve the problems not only of political reform but also of the relation of the peasantry with the ruling elite, and of maintaining an equilibrium between two cultures while living more or less wholly in one.

Aesthetically the problem becomes manifested towards the end of the film when Koro and a girlfriend of hers drive in Koro's expensive car to find Sidy at the house of the old wise woman. Sidy may be on a spiritual quest, but the women are there as part of a love story, and in the mode of a camping vacation. This situation gives rise to light domestic comedy, whose thinness vitiates the seriousness with which we take Sidy's quest. If he is not just on vacation, it does seem like this is a passing episode in his life rather than the defining moment; an initiation, but not into the life he will really lead. Sidy returns to the village, and — to be excessively cynical — extracts from it what he needs to guarantee his entry into the ruling class.

Politically the problem is that class analysis becomes obscured by bourgeois moral voluntarism, which tends to be the specter haunting culturalist ideologies — the assumption that everything can be solved by will or imagination alone, and/or solved on the isolated level of culture. Symbolic healings and unifying of the national imagination are necessary, and an altogether appropriate task for artists. But if they are premature or not solidly grounded in an analysis of the total national situation they will seem mythological, in the sense of artificial, something which is in fact hard to live by.

Bassek Ba Khobio's film is more coherent, practical, focused in its intelligence, without Adama Drabo's wide-ranging exuberance. Its ambition is not a symbolic resolution of polarized abstractions, but a concrete model for action, even if it partially begs the cultural issue. Social being determines consciousness, as the wise man said. Certainly the history of socialism in Africa is full of examples of policies which failed because they ignored the culture of the people they were intended to serve. Still the cultural values which really matter most, the film asserts undogmatically, don't concern the occult or marriage customs, but rather one's relation to work — with whether or not the relation between work and culture is

dynamic, freeing the creativity of the labor of the peasant masses and overturning any cultural and political superstructure which doesn't serve its interests.

NOTES

1. Ferid Boughedir organizes his overview of Sub-Saharan African cinema around this theme, though he prefers to name the opposition "old and new" rather than "tradition and modernity." A. Gardies calls it "a banal theme...[with] a long literary and cinematic lineage" (73; my translation). In applying to cinematic production Fanon's famous outline of the three stages through which the colonized intellectual passes (from *Wretched of the Earth*, 222-23), Tshome Gabriel locates this theme in the second phase, "The Remembrance Phase," 32. See also Ukadike, 8-9, 12, and 84.

As always, there is a grave danger in generalizing about "Africa." This theme is much less prominent in Nigerian cinema, for instance, for reasons that include the familiar contrast between the British colonial policy of indirect rule and the French colonial policy of assimilation, and the very different methods and cultures of film production in Nigeria and francophone Africa.

2. Pierre Haffner argues for a strong connection between African cinema and Africa's cities, noting among other things that the cineastes are themselves almost all the children of the cities, and that most of their films are set there rather than in the "bush" (101). He ends his essay (published in 1987) with a hint of a new turning towards the historical/ traditional/ village scene (105).

3. This is indeed an oversimplification: the difficulties of reintegration into village life of a Westernized or modernized traveler have been a theme from the beginning of African cinema: the short *LE RETOUR D'UN AVENTURIER* (1966) by Mustapha Alassane, and Ganda's first film *CABASCABO* (1968), are early examples from Niger. Still, there does seem to have been a noticeable shift in the respective weight given the themes of leaving and returning to the village.

4. There is by now a massive literature on this subject; the first important text is Edward Saïd's *Orientalism*. Ukadike sees that African films presenting the traditional way of life can be read as either reinforcing or subverting the Western ethnographic model (254). Elsewhere he suggests that African audiences are not interested in seeing scenes of daily life, that the pounding of millet and so on appeals to foreigners but merely alienates Africans (263). This is probably a bit simplistic, but the point is well taken.

5. California Newsreel distributes these films on video in the U.S. Contact them at 149 Ninth Street, San Francisco CA 94103. Phone 415/621-6196. For universities that order nine or more titles, there is a special 50% discount price of \$99 per tape.

6. The criticism of Malo is more apparent, or more continuous, in the novel version (*Sango Malo: Le maître du canton*), written by the filmmaker, which was published in Paris on the same day in February 1991 that the film premiered at the FESPACO film festival in Ouagadougou.

7. At a press conference at FESPACO, February 1991.

8. Interview with Haynes, Ouagadougou, February 1991.

9. On the integral structure of "corruption" in the African state, see Bayart. In the event, Traoré's government was overthrown by a popular revolt very soon after the film was made.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Claire Denis interview Colonial observations

by Mark A. Reid

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This interview took place on 21 August 1994 at the Lido Bar in the Montparnasse area of Paris. Claire Denis was kind enough to take an hour away from editing a short film for the Inter-European television Channel Arte.

Claire Denis is the director of three feature films: CHOCOLAT (1988), S'EN FOUT LA MORT (NO FEAR NO DIE, 1990), and J'AI PAS SOMMEIL (I CAN'T SLEEP, 1993). She has also directed the documentaries MAN NO RUN (1989) and KEEP IT FOR YOURSELF (1991). Her films made for television includes JACQUES RIVETTE, LE VEILLEUR (Channel La Sept, 1989), NI UNE, NI DEUX (1991), and LA ROBE A CERCEAUX (Channel Arte, 1992).[1]

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Mark: Where were you born?

Claire: In Paris, but I left when I was two months old. My parents took us to the southern region of Cameroon. During my youth, I also lived in Somalia, Djibouti, and Burkina Faso, which at that time was called Upper Volta.

Mark: What brought your family to West Africa?

Claire: When I was seven years old, my father worked for the French Government, which sent him to Ivory Coast and Cameroon.

Mark: Was he a Cooperant? [author's note: A French Cooperant is a governmental worker who may be affiliated with education, foreign aid, or French cultural centers in Africa.]

Claire: That was before the creation of the French Ministry for Cooperation with African Nations. When I was a child, my father was working for the French colonial administration.

Mark: You're referring to the pre-1960s?

Claire: Yes. And during the post-colonial period, my father worked for an African company. Actually he still works for Mali even though he is now quite old.

Mark: Did you attend grammar school and high school in these African countries?

Claire: During the colonial period, French people organized their own schools. French children could also attend schools where they'd mix with African children. My parents always favored schools attended by both French and African children and were against sending us to French schools exclusively enrolled by white students.

My father was very interested in African culture and spoke many African languages. Politically, he was always in favor of African independence; many of his African friends were already fighting against the French government. My father was a friend of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the first President of Ivory Coast [Ivory Coast received its independence on 7 August 1960]. During the colonial period in the anti-colonialist movement, Boigny was a brilliant intellectual and activist. It was only during the post-colonial period that he became a dictator.

Mark: When did you leave West Africa?

Claire: When I was thirteen something terrible happened when we were living in Yaounde, in Cameroon. Unfortunately, my sister and I had not been vaccinated against polio, and we contracted it. We spent a month in Yaounde trying to fight the disease, but our health worsened so we returned to France where we were hospitalized. My sister became paralyzed. My father continued to do business in Africa, but my mother was traumatized by my sister's condition and refused to return because of my sister's paralysis. At seventeen, I returned to West Africa and attended school in Senegal, where I lived with my parents' friends.

CHOCOLAT: CLAIRE DENIS FILMS HER AFRICAN PAST

Mark: I want to shift our discussion from your childhood memories of growing up in West Africa to how you use these childhood memories in your film work. Would you say that your film *CHOCOLAT* is autobiographical or semiautobiographical?

Claire: I started writing *CHOCOLAT* as a very autobiographical script. It was like writing a journal until I decided to add fictional elements to it. While working on the script, I decided that I needed someone to help me write the actual screenplay, who would help me put distance between my personal life and the story I wanted to tell. It was then that I first started working with Jean-Pol, co-author for *CHOCOLAT*, who would later become co-author for *S'EN FOUT LA MORT* and *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL*.

Mark: Jean-Pol Fargeau?

Claire: Yes. I told him I wanted to work with him because I was interested in discussing my writing an African diary. I initially started to write the script based on real incidents from my own African childhood. I knew that French colonials and Africans led very separate social lives, and I also knew French children commonly became friends with the black house-servants. I also had heard that some of the wives of French colonial administrators had had sexual relations with their African

male servants.

When I decided to turn my personal memory of life in West Africa into a fictional film, I thought about using this material. In my story, however, the black servant, played by Isaach de Bankole, rejected his white mistress's sexual overtures. I imagined the manservant's interests as limited to psychological rather than physical, sexual involvement with the white woman. In *CHOCOLAT* I expanded upon this social reality to dramatize how a lonely white woman might desire her black manservant sexually. I added this material because during my childhood, in the colonial period, such incidents of sexual liaisons between African male servants and white females occurred several times and resulted in big scandals. Then I remembered a novel I'd read by a Cameroonian writer which influenced how I developed the black manservant's role.

Mark: Was the author Mongo Beti?[2]

Claire: Not Mongo Beti. The novel dealt with a young manservant in a French colonial administrator's house. While absolutely no love affair took place between the black servant and his white mistress, he became offended when making his employers' bed, when he would visualize that couple's private sexual life. I borrowed this idea from this Cameroonian novel and placed it in my script. I decided to create the possibility of a sexual relation. At a certain point in the narrative, the black manservant would refuse his white colonial mistress. What I find most interesting is the black manservant's ability to refuse this sexual liaison.

Mark: Why does this interest you? And why would he refuse an opportunity to have sex?

Claire: First, this film is set in 1957. I think then even a politically uneducated young man would fear that if he gave into his sexual desires, he would be imprisoned. Second, he would never be an equal partner in the relationship. Last, he could not run away with the woman. I thought his best reaction would be to reject her advances.

His rejection of this white woman demystifies the prevalent screen image of the black stud and the exotic black, something imagined in Hollywood films like *OUT OF AFRICA*. *CHOCOLAT* rejects images of the colonized black African as an always passive subject who bends to the white European's whims. I wanted to show that the choice lay in the black man's calloused hands instead of in the woman's finely manicured sexual fantasies. Personally, this story is more interesting than most stories about Africa, which usually show that if the white woman wants sex with the black man, the black man is more than happy to have her.

Mark: This reminds me of race relations in the United States — for example, the Gus character in D.W. Griffith's *BIRTH OF A NATION* or the way contemporary U.S. media construct young African American males as killers and rapists and portray black women as insatiable crack addicts and whores. It is also interesting that during the 1950s U.S. racists and European colonialists used a fear of black sexuality to criticize whites who participated in both the Civil Rights and the anti-colonial movements.

CLAIRE DENIS ON CASTING BLACK MEN

Mark: For your three features, CHOCOLAT, S'EN FOUT LA MORT and J'AI PAS SOMMEIL, how did you go about securing a producer and distributor? And what were some of the problems you encountered? Richard Courcet (who stars as Camille the leading role in J'AI PAS SOMMEIL) said when I interviewed him a week ago that it is difficult to cast black actors as major characters in French film. He said that producers and distributors would not accept a black lead. I want to know if this was true for any of your three films since all three have a black lead?

Claire: It's a little more complex than that. I think that before Spike Lee's DO THE RIGHT THING, producers might have been reluctant to cast black actor as leads in French films. Perhaps, if I wanted to make a film like John Singleton's BOYZ N' THE HOOD, producers might find the project attractive because it would reach a market of French, multi-racial, working-class youth. These kids like world beat and rap music. Film producers react negatively to how I dramatize a topic in my films, rather than to how blacks are featured. They don't understand how I want to cast blacks; producers regularly suggest that if I cast black actors, then they should be erotic "objects."

In my films, black people are never objects. They are subjects who actively choose what they want. Producers usually have a very exotic idea about what black actors should do and where they should be seen. Producers' scripts would liken black characters to lions and elephants. In contrast, I think Blacks featured in my films are "noir" (black).

Mark: "Noir" referring to a genre type, as in film noir.

S'EN FOUT LA MORT: HOMAGE TO FRANTZ FANON

Claire: A typical producer would prefer a film like CHOCOLAT with more action. Although you haven't yet seen S'EN FOUT LA MORT, it is the second film of a trilogy which begins with CHOCOLAT and ends with J'AI PAS SOMMEIL. S'EN FOUT LA MORT is really the missing link between CHOCOLAT and J'AI PAS SOMMEIL.

Mark: You mentioned that your reading of a Cameroonian writer [Ferdinand Oyono] and your adolescent experiences in colonial French West Africa helped you co-author the scenario for CHOCOLAT. What influenced you to write your second feature film S'EN FOUT LA MORT?

Claire: It's a film that's influenced by Frantz Fanon's *Peaux noires, Masques blancs* (*Black Skins, White Masks*). I understood something in Fanon's book that touched me immensely. I am a very sensitive person who can't stand the feeling of humiliation, regardless if blacks or whites are the objects of this humiliation. Reading Fanon did something important to my life. When I read *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), it increased my anger over the social inequities that groups and individuals are forced to endure. I bought Fanon's works in a bookstore. At this time his writings were not taught in school, but my father told me a lot about this book. Many people rejected *The Wretched of the Earth* because Fanon went to Algeria and supported the Algerians during France's colonial war with Algiers. I would say Fanon was considered a villain then, but when you are fourteen or fifteen and you read *Les Damnés de la terre*, and you've been raised in the midst of the African colonies, it shocks you. Really, that experience will stay

with me for the rest of my life.

Mark: What does the film say about the black experience in contemporary France?

Claire: In *S'EN FOUT LA MORT*, I deal with a French West Indian man here in Paris, exploring his psychological weakness and the spiritual tragedy of his life. Fanon describes a special type of neurosis — colonized people feeling psychologically defeated even though they are physically free to determine their future. Thus, the film tells a story about two black men who have migrated to France. Isaach de Bankole stars as Dah from Benin, and Alex Descas stars as Jocelyn from the West Indies. Both men decide to make quick money by training roosters and staging illegal cockfights. Of course, they must overcome racists who set obstacles in their path. Dah, the African, would try to overcome these obstacles but his West Indian partner is unable to deal with the setbacks.[3]

Mark: How did the French press and the African and Caribbean communities receive *S'EN FOUT LA MORT*?

Claire: The press liked *S'EN FOUT LA MORT* even though it is a very weird film. I received a lot of letters from the black community here in France, especially from Caribbean people. They reacted strongly to this film and asked me how I came to know this secret of thefts. I told them about Fanon's revelations in *Black Skins*, *White Masks* and assured them that this knowledge did not result from my own findings. I think the African community liked the film. Also Abdullah Ibrahim of the group Dollar Brand did the music for *CHOCOLAT* and *S'EN FOUT LA MORT*. Abdullah is a South African musician who immediately understood what I was saying in *S'EN FOUT LA MORT*.

J'AI PAS SOMMEIL: A BLACK PARISIAN GAY SERIAL KILLER

Mark: How did the public react to *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL*? Could you comment separately about the mainstream French audience and the black West Indian community in France. Then could you follow with comments on your reception in Germany, Britain, the United States and Canada?

Claire: I think *Variety* really disliked *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL*. I was told that they said it was "boring shit" or something like that.

Mark: The music for *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL* was composed by Kali, an Afro-Caribbean musician/ composer and Jean-Louis Murat. How did you end up selecting the work of these two artists for the soundtrack of *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL*?

Claire: I've known Kali for years. I find that without the song "Racine" the film would not work. Jean-Louis Murat is a well-known French lyricist and composer, whose song "Le lien defait" describes the theme of this film.

Mark: What other types of music has Murat composed?

Claire: Murat is very famous here in France. But I chose him for different reasons than his fame. His songs speak about sex, and his songs contain something very dark. In the film, Camille dances to the song "Le lien defait." The lyrics say, "The link is cut, there's no more connection." I thought that this was the film's central

theme because a society and a city work best when the links are tight. For me, life is a story of connections — without them society will self-destruct. So I chose this song, and then Murat offered to compose music for the film.

Mark: How did you cast the three films? Was your casting for CHOCOLAT any different from when you sought your cast for J'AI PAS SOMMEIL?

Claire: CHOCOLAT was my first film, so I chose professional actors. I got along very well with Isaach (de Bankole) during the shooting of CHOCOLAT. When I did S'EN FOUT LA MORT, I asked Isaach to work on the film. Isaac is a close friend of Alex Descas, so we wanted them to work together. We, as a group, decided the casting of the film.

The casting of J'AI PAS SOMMEIL was much different. I had to find the right guy to play the leading role. It took me a year to find Richard Courcet, who plays the role of Camille, a black gay man living in the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris. He is both a thief and killer of elderly women.

Mark: When you were looking for Camille, what characteristics were you looking for that Alex Descas and Isaach de Bankole did not have? Physically, Camille had to be a young Afro-Caribbean man. But what other characteristics were you looking for in this role?

Claire: I wanted a young Afro-Caribbean man because I knew only an Afro-Caribbean could understand that feeling, that very special feeling. So I interviewed 200 Afro-Caribbean adolescents.

Mark: You would not accept an African or an African American?

Claire: Why should I interview an American? I interviewed young Afro-Caribbean men who lived in Paris because they knew about "l'Affaire Paulin" [the story of serial killer Thierry Paulin].

Mark: But Richard Courcet said that before hearing about your film project, he had never heard of this Afro-Caribbean serial killer who murdered elderly Parisian women.

Claire: He knew, he knew. He did not know it by heart, but he knew and he understood exactly what I wanted. The Afro-Caribbean Parisian community knew about the film I was going to make and that I was casting actors. When Richard arrived for the cast call, he said, "I don't want to be in the film. I don't want to be an actor. But I want to see what you're going to do with this theme because I'm interested in the story." He kept watching me direct the actors as they read the script. Richard had problems with wearing a dress and doing the effeminate things that the character Camille must enact. That's why he didn't initially want to read for the role, but still he hung around the set.

Two weeks before I began shooting the film, I had this young man ready to play Camille. I'd decided I'd cast him in that role. When Richard asked if he could read for the role just for fun, I said, "No it's too late." Then I said, "OK." He did the test, so badly it seemed a masterpiece of shit. He said, "You see I'm bad. Now I'll leave you and go home." I'd decided to cast Richard in the role of Camille and felt he

wanted to be in the film, so I called him and told him he had the role if he wanted it. He hid the fact that he was very happy.

Mark: When I first spotted Richard Courcet walking around Rue St Denis, I thought he was a professional actor. Then he informed me that this was his first role. What about the other cast members? I read that Katerina Gulubova is also new to film. How did you get Beatrice Dalle, whom you cast after you had cast another young woman for the role of Mona, the wife of Theo?

Claire: Yes, I had chosen another actress, younger than Beatrice Dalle. The film calls for Camille's brother, Theo, played by Alex Descas, to have a young child with Mona, a young white French woman. In the film, their daughter is a preschooler, whom Mona finds requires too much of her time. Mona abandons her daughter and husband and then goes back to them.

Three weeks before the shooting, the young actress who was to play Mona decided that she did not want to make the film. She said that her agent told her that the role of Mona would be bad for her career. She explained, "I have a very nice image among the French public."

Mark: Is she a well known actress?

Claire: A very well known actress — there's no need to name her. I told her, "OK, I can find another actress." I admit I wasn't happy, but if an actress says a film will hurt her career, all I can do is say goodbye and wish her luck.

After her departure, my producers wanted to cancel the film. My agent called me the next morning and said, "You're in deep shit because you have no bankable actress." I said I'd do the film without her and would find another actress. The producer called and said, "We can't make the film. We raised money based on your ability to cast a famous actress. If we don't have a famous actress, we don't have enough money to make the film."

Luckily, my agent is also the actress Beatrice Dalle's agent. She phoned when she heard my film project was in trouble. She said that although she hadn't read the script yet, she'd accept the role of Mona if I wanted her. She said she liked my previous work and she liked Alex Descas, the Afro-Caribbean actor whom I cast to play Theo, Mona's husband.

Mark: Can you say something more about your co-scenarist Jean-Pol Fargeau, who co-authored both *S'EN FOUT LA MORT* and *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL*?

Claire: Jean-Pol Fargeau is a dramatist whose work has appeared in the theater journal *Actes Sud*.

Mark: How did you go about writing the scenario for *J'AI PAS SOMMEIL*?

Claire: First, I wrote a ten-page story. I needed to work on my own then to find out where it was heading. I worked for a month doing research on the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris. [This is the Parisian neighborhood where the murders actually took place]. I would get up in the morning, go to the eighteenth arrondissement and spend the day there in cafes and bars. After spending days in this area, I arrived at a sense of the neighborhood. I then knew how I wanted to

begin the film: Somebody from another country would arrive in this neighborhood. That's how I got the idea for the character Daiga, the young Lithuanian woman who arrives in Paris and takes up residence in the same eighteenth arrondissement hotel where Camille lives.

Mark: Daiga, played by Katerina Golubeva, must fictionally represent Claire Denis? Does she parallel your foreign-like presence in the eighteenth arrondissement when you were doing preproduction research?

Claire: Perhaps Daiga is me. The first image I had for the film was to show Daiga as a young woman from another country driving to Paris, knowing nothing, and meeting public enemy #1, Camille.

INFLUENCES OF JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT AND FRANCIS BACON

Mark: You have mentioned in an earlier interview that modern painters greatly move you. How has modern painting influenced your second feature film, S'EN FOUT LA MORT?

Claire: When I did S'EN FOUT LA MORT, I needed something to support my images. The work of the African American painter, Jean-Michel Basquiat, haunted me. When I directed Alex Descas in S'EN POUT LA MORT, I took him to a Jean-Michel Basquiat exhibition. The exhibition showed Basquiat paintings that had corpses and skeletons with deathlike smiles. I told Alex that I wouldn't direct him when he gets stabbed in the film's final scene, but he should remember Basquiat's images with death-like smiles.

Mark: In your third film, you are heavily influenced by homoerotic art. Will you talk a little about how you used homoerotic art to decorate Camille's hotel room?

Claire: For some reason, when I was thinking about my third film project, J'AI PAS SOMMEIL, I thought that the hotel rooms should be reddish-pink, so flesh looks raw-like. Then I found out that this idea for reddish-pink flesh was not my own invention. My idea had come from Francis Bacon's paintings. I wanted to film an image that expressed all those bodies in Bacon's raw, fleshy pictures. I thought that this feeling should pervade my film, which is a story about raw flesh. It was almost my invention.

Mark: You were not influenced by the work of Egon Schiele?

Claire: No, Bacon has a very peculiar use of color so that you never know if something is raw or rotten flesh. I never returned to look at Bacon's paintings to write the film. Do you understand what I mean? My color selection was based on my memory, and I did not return to Bacon to verify this memory. That's why we painted the hotel room this special red tint, and the bed sheets this special purple.

Mark: You have spoken solely of Francis Bacon, but I saw many references in Camille's room and elsewhere to the homoerotic photography of Robert Mapplethorpe. In addition to Mapplethorpe references, a few of your images and characters remind me of the drawings and paintings of the French artist Pierre Molinier.

Claire: Perhaps you are correct about Mapplethorpe. Maybe this is true for the black and white stills that are present in Camille's hotel room. And, of course you cannot do anything with homoerotic photographs without reference to some of Mapplethorpe's black and white photography. My first response to Mapplethorpe's homoerotic work, however, was one of shock mixed with disgust. This repulsion lasted for a year in which I could not bear to look at his work, could not stand viewing his objectification of the black man's body.

Mark: This is similar to what you have earlier said about the way mainstream films use black actors. You said that film producers want black characters portrayed as exotic sexual objects rather than subjects in control of their destiny.

Claire: If you want to make a film like OUT OF AFRICA, with lions and beautiful, half-clothed, black people, film producers will not reject your project.

NOT A STEREOTYPE: THIERRY, CAMILLE AND RICHARD COURCET

Mark: How did you research the homosexual and transvestite material in J'AI PAS SOMMEIL?

Claire: I went to many travestite clubs so as to create a realistic dance scene in which Camille is dressed in drag. I did not want Camille to appear effeminate by wearing false breasts, high heels or thick make-up. I wanted him to still appear masculine with a young man's hairless chest.

Mark: Can you say something about Thierry Paulin, the real killer of elderly women who lived in the eighteenth arrondissement neighborhood of Paris?

Claire: Thierry Paulin lived in Paris and killed old ladies. He lived a homosexual life with rich white lovers. The real Paulin was hot. He was a famous dancer, liked by all who knew him.

Mark: How were you able to direct a debutant actor like Richard Courcet to perform the role of a dispassionate killer of defenseless, elderly white women?

Claire: I don't have a concept for directing actors. In a way, I see it more like choreography. This is to say that for me, directing is something that goes through the body. Directing and acting exist in an organic relation similar to a dance between director and actors.

For example, Richard Courcet never acted before, but he understands the rhythm and movements needed to act. He is a great actor even though inexperienced. He's clever. I would never manipulate an actor. Don't think I used an innocent guy and directed him like a puppet. Richard felt the continuity of the part, even the killing scenes. I wanted Richard to grow into the role and dramatically dominate his scenes. I did not want any scene to dominate Richard, so in the long sequence in which Richard strangles an elderly lady, he controls the scene and directs himself. If he wants to become an actor, he has everything that it takes.

Mark: Are you working on another film with Courcet?

Claire: I try to help him make decisions about his acting career. First, he has to make up his mind about whether he wants to be an actor or not. I try to help him

with that. I think he's very talented but I don't want to interfere with his final decision.

Mark: In my interview with him, he did not appear arrogant, even though he had a feature role in this film.

Claire: In *Libération* [a Parisian newspaper], they said Richard Courcet is this year's only film star. Richard pretends that he did not care, but in fact he really did care what the paper reported. During an interview on French TV [Channel Antenne 2], a reporter asked Richard, "So you must trust Claire Denis, since performing the role of an Afro-Caribbean killer of old ladies is difficult, especially for a member of the AfroCaribbean Parisian community." Richard wisely replied, "No, I did it for money."

Mark: Yes, he told me the same thing when I asked him a similar question.

Claire: He was so witty. And he followed with an even better response. The television interviewer asked him, "Was it difficult for you to do the scenes in which you are killing?" Richard looked directly into the guy's face and said, "Difficult? But I'm Black!" So the television interviewer could only respond, "Yes, of course."

Mark: Do you view casting an Afro-Caribbean man who kills old ladies as a "politically incorrect" thing to do?

Claire: I prefer "political incorrections."

Mark: In what sense?

Claire: In the sense that women and racial minorities remain protected from being represented as both evil and good. I happily made a French film in which the black character is bad. I think taking this freedom permits us to make a human image of black people. A black man should not have to be always characterized as a good guy. Films that portray Blacks as always good and eternally suffering promote racist images.

Mark: I am the first to agree with you. But the term "politically incorrect" is bogus. Racist imagery is not what your film projects. Rather than limiting your film to depicting an evil black man, you portray a black guy who is sensitive, loving and also bad. This method of portraying Blacks does not occur in the many U.S. mainstream films that portray black men as bad black men.[4]

Claire: In my film, Camille is bad but remains human. He is not a cliché. Although I am a white French woman, a part of myself is similar to Camille. This fictional person Camille and the real person Thierry Poulain exist — something made him into a serial killer.

Mark: What makes Camille's brother Theo, played by Alex Descas, different from his murderous sibling?

Claire: The script initially called for Theo to be a nice guy. He was the good brother, a sort of brother's keeper to Camille, his bad brother. What I like in *BROTHER'S KEEPER* is that one of the brothers has chosen to remain "bad" while being the "good" brother seems pure chance. You don't decide whether you're going to be the

good one or the bad one. If there's a bad one, then the other automatically gets deemed the "good" one.

Alex Descas, the actor playing Theo, found his "good" brother role naively written. He rejected Theo's unquestioned goodness. Alex disagreed with my direction and suggested alternatives. He said, "I'm going to be a bad guy — but not a killer. I'm going to be bitter and unhappy." So Alex emphasized Theo as a moody malcontent — moody because of his social experiences in Paris. I finally accepted Alex's decision because his direction here balanced and humanized the actions of his brother Camille and his wife Mona, who otherwise would have seemed like a bitch.

Mark: How did the African-American audience react to S'EN FOUT LA MORT?

Claire: I presented the film in New York. At the second screening, a group of young African Americans said that they did not like the character Jocelyn, played by Alex Descas, because at the end he dies stabbed by a white man. I explained that Jocelyn wants to die and seeks death by looking for trouble. I told these young kids that Jocelyn's role is based on what I found in Franz Fanon and that they should read Fanon to understand why Jocelyn seeks death. Why not portray a very pessimistic black man whose dignity is destroyed and who prefers to die rather than continue living? They responded, "Why not? Because you're using our brother."

Maybe I have gotten old and my thoughts out of touch with this new generation. But I still don't think that serious social inequities can be solved by nonviolent means. I really believe this.

NOTES

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1. Sony Classic distributes CHOCOLAT and First Run Features distributes NO FEAR NO DIE (S'EN FOUT LA MORT). At this writing, I CAN'T SLEEP (J'AI PAS SOMMEIL) is not distributed in the United States.

2. The Cameroonian novel that Claire Denis refers to is Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (Paris: Editions Julliard, 1956). It is available in English as *Boy!*

3. The film also features Jean-Claude Brialy as Pierre Ardennes the owner of the arena where the cockfights are staged, and Solveig Dommartin as Toni who is Pierre's lover.

4. For more discussion on mainstream characterizations of the good/ bad black, see Mark A. Reid, "The Black Gangster Film," *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Grant (Austin: University of TX Press, 1995): 456-473.

Working class girls and popular music in Taiwan

by Fang-Chih Yang

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I was an English teacher at Ta-Cheng Vocational High School from January to June, 1990. During these six months, I lived in the dormitory with the female students. I ate with them and spent my leisure time with them, almost like a peer. The students there rarely studied because they knew they were already assigned to work as lifelong manual laborers, just by attending a vocational high school. Since they needed manual skills for making a living, not academic achievement, leisure activities preoccupied them more than school. Both boys and girls were mostly interested in popular music.

During that time, I was responsible for supervising some social activities held by the students living in the dorm. Their social programs usually involved singing and dancing. They also gathered together and sang during most of their leisure time. Consequently, I found it useful to relate class material to TV shows, stars, and popular songs to get their attention. I left ten minutes for them to sing in class. This led me to investigate how music as a cultural form influences, structures, and empowers these working class teenagers' lives.

Taiwan's educational system uses the entrance examination to decide which students will go to "good" or "bad" schools. It functions to stratify the future social status of the students and guarantees the formation of a class society. Most students with good academic standing can pass the entrance examination and enroll in prestigious high schools, which serve as a bridge to the universities. Other less intelligent students either go to a junior college or public vocational high school, depending upon the prestige of the school (in Taiwan, junior colleges and high schools are at the same level). In a public vocational school, students receive three years' of vocational training. These two school systems still offer a possibility of entering a college or university.

The "leftovers" either go into the labor market or to a private vocational high school. Such a vocational high school functions as an intermediary between students and corporations. It offers corporations cheap manual labor in the name of teaching vocational training. Students attend school for three months and then go to the factory for three months for "practical training." Because of the relations between schools and companies, most of the students from a given high school end

up working for the same factory after they graduate. The adolescents attending these schools are usually from working-class families (especially working-class families from the rural area) or single-parent families. However, since most working class parents could not afford to pay for the high tuition charged by these private vocational schools, the students have to do "practical training" to pay for their own tuition.

Ta-Cheng Vocational High School is located in the poorest county in the southern part of Taiwan. Due to the region's economic stagnation and the government's unwillingness to develop the country's less financially rewarding areas, Yun-Lin (where Ta-Cheng is located) has remained an agriculturally based county. Most people there make their living from fishing and farming. Socially and culturally, this county tends to be more conservative than other industrialized counties. This social and cultural conservatism shapes the younger generation's childhood. However, as young people enter social institutions, they experience the "modern" world, both from the media and their personal experiences by traveling to the cities. Thus, the youth from this conservative county tend to experience more conflicts between traditional and modern values. Their confrontation with the outside world also makes them realize their disadvantaged geographic location and family background.

In May 1992, I went back to stay in the dorm for two weeks to interview the girls I had known for the past two years. My long-term goal is to write on girls culture, especially that of working class girls, who are rarely taken seriously. Two years ago, these girls had been freshman. Now they would soon graduate from high school and step into the world. To make the interview setting and our interaction more natural, I didn't start interviewing until after three days. During this time, I shared their leisure time with them. We watched soap operas together, we talked about boys and marriage, we told dirty jokes, we dressed up and we even helped each other doing skin and hair care.

After three days, I started doing individual interviews in their rooms. Their rooms are their very own private spaces where they have total control. I wanted to make them feel as comfortable talking to me as if I were their intimate friend. Furthermore, the decorations on the wall revealed to me a lot about their culture. Pictures of stars on the wall, romance books on the bed, teddy bears on the bed, and religious books on the bookshelves all indicated their personal preferences, tastes and even their memories.

Before interviewing them, I used a questionnaire to inquire about their age, their parents' occupation, their personal background, and their most favorite and least favorite songs. The oral interview was open-ended and, in a sense, unstructured. I assumed that people sharing similar cultural and social backgrounds would have similar tastes. These girls had a similar social background and a shared interest in popular music. The girls were in their late teens, aged 17 to 19, and they faced leaving school and entering the labor pool. They all lived in the school dormitory, where they considered popular music an indispensable part of life. I conducted both individual and group interviews with the girls. Individual interviews were conducted first to learn more about their personal history, tastes, family influences, and idiosyncrasies. Group interviews were conducted to explicate the power relationships within this group, to untangle how the group members interacted

with each other in their conversation, how they exchanged opinions, and how this group was formed.

Since I always played the part of the girls' big sister and advisor, our relationships have been languid and always harmonious. However, my purpose in writing a thesis about them made them uncomfortable. Some of them tried to show their best and covered up some facts they considered "low," "ignorant" or "inappropriate." For example, three of them denied the fact that they had a crush on some stars or denied that stars were an important factor in determining their choice of their favorite songs. In some places, they contradicted themselves. Here is an example from my interview with Chen, Bi-Hsia (B):

"I don't have any particular favorite singer. I am not like other people who idolize stars."

And later she said:

"I love Liu De-Hua, I think he is great, I love every song he sings and I watch all the movies he acts in...Think about it, it's just like he is singing to you. Do you know the feelings? It's, it's so wonderful. I wish some guy would sing such beautiful songs to me!"

I started with more casual and enticing questions till I found them more open to my questions. Then I began to go on to more serious questions. I started with questions about their opinions and their relationships with boys, and then I began to solicit their opinions on popular music and their use of music. One problem with some of the interviews is that sometimes I got too involved in the conversation and started to talk about my personal experiences in relation to their experiences, and sometimes I offered my opinions or suggestions about their personal problems. Since I realized that I was having too much personal involvement with the respondents in some interviews, I tried to distance myself in later interviews, and at the same time respond and encourage them to talk without talking too much myself.

When I started the group interviewing, only three of the five students were there. They talked very loudly, yelled and screamed. They were very excited about the topics they were talking about. They sang songs in turn to answer my questions. During most of the time, they talked simultaneously without listening to each other, and then the people with the highest volume finally got our attention, and a little while later, other members in the group would try to respond to her opinions. After approximately twenty minutes, the other two came in, although only one of them actively participated in the already-constructed conversation. The other one remained silent during the interview. The one who remained silent was considered a good student and was, in a sense, outside of their group. This interview lasted about forty-five minutes, and then the "good" student went away.

Then, all the others started to tell me dirty jokes such as making fun of the act of lovemaking. After the interview, one of the interviewees thanked me for offering a chance to let them get together and talk about things they enjoyed. This group interview offered me a chance to see how the group members interacted, negotiated and communicated with each other, what languages they used, and how they encapsulated themselves as a group and excluded other members.

SCHOOL AS A PLACE FOR HAVING FUN

These girls are at a time in their lives when they will graduate from high school and step into the world. It's probably the last stage of their formal education. All these girls have mixed feelings toward school. School is the source of their boredom and frustration but also the place where they meet their friends and find meaning in life. For these girls, school becomes not a place for learning, but socialization. From my experience teaching these students, many of them sleep in class, talk, read romances, or do nothing but daydream during class time. Except for commercial training courses, which accounted for one-third of class time, the girls care nothing about the classes and are bored.

In conquering the boredom of school life, singing, listening to a walkman, reading romances and gossiping become very important. H explains that she and her classmates share a lyrics collection, so whenever they get a chance, they sing:

H: "Sometimes on our way to the restaurant or to school. Sometimes at school, during the break, four or five of us will get together, take out our lyrics collection and start to sing. It's real fun. Though our voices are quite scary...Well, as long as we are happy, so what?"

Dorm life is an extension of school life. The girls' behavior in the dorm is scrutinized, reported to the teachers at schools, and graded. All five girls express their boredom with living in the dorm. B even characterizes it as "living in a prison." The students living in the dorm are not allowed to go out after 7:00 p.m. The school hired a dorm supervisor to supervise their behavior, to protect their personal name as well as the school's name. During my interview, all five girls expressed their resentment toward their ex-dorm supervisor, and they were very proud to have "kicked her out of the dorm."

H told me in a very emotional tone that the dorm supervisor forbade the students to make any noise after 8:00 p.m. She even demanded that the students turned off the volume when they watched television. H expressed her dissatisfaction: "We weren't supposed to come here to be tortured." One time, the girls got so mad, so they decided to confront the supervisor by violating dorm regulations:

"One night, we exploded. We turned on the radio real loud after 8:00 p.m., and we followed the radio and sang together real loud too. We did it on purpose."

The supervisor came and had a quarrel with the girls. She used indecent language to call the girls things like bitches, ugly devils, and dirty jerks. She even grabbed one of the girls and pushed her against the wall. Although the girls were punished for "not respecting the supervisor," the supervisor had to quit her job because of the hostility she had confronted from all the girls in the dorm.

These students are aware of their inferior situation, and they are also aware of the boundaries for expressing their resistance. Thus, what they do is to challenge authority within the authority's accommodating boundary. Dick Hebdige's concept of bricolage best explains how these girls resist the dominant order through re-appropriating the meanings of available cultural products. In the case of collectively resisting the dorm supervisor, the girls used music to make noise, to

upset authority. The acts of singing and playing music became tools for a power struggle, for expressing resistance.

To summarize, school life, for the girls, can be identified with frustration, boredom, and fun-making. Despite the drawbacks of the school, it offers a place for the students to meet new friends and develop their social life. Cultural commodities, such as music, when located in the girls' school/life experiences, function to counter their boredom and the frustration, and also function as tools for pleasure seeking.

THE GIRLS AND MTV, KTV PARLORS

Due to the establishment of MTV, KTV and KA-LA-OK (karaoke) parlors, singing becomes an important activity for music consumption. Beginning in 1986, the term MTV in Taiwan has referred to a leisure center where people can go to watch movies in a small private room (with an extra service of drinks). Thus, MTV is a combination of coffee shop, theater, motel, teahouse, and restaurant. KTV is a diversified form of MTV. K stands for KA-LA-OK. KA-LA-OK has two meanings. One refers to the equipment for singing, such as tapes, microphones, and amplifiers. The other meaning refers to the leisure centers that provide equipment for singing. Like KALA-OK, KTV also refers to leisure centers where people can follow the tape and sing. Unlike KALA-OK, which provides facilities for people to sing in public, KTV offers music videos and private rooms for singing. Like MTV centers, KTV centers are divided into separate rooms. Each room is provided with singing equipment. Some big KTV centers also offer KA-LA-OK.

Sometimes the girls I interviewed go to the KTV parlors, with private rooms, everyday during the week; mostly they go there only on weekends and holidays. KTV belongs to the night. The girls usually stay in the KTV parlor till 2 or 3 a.m. when they are in Taipei, but if they are in the south, they go there very early (like eight at night), and stay till 11 or 12 p.m. They go there to have fun, kill time, and release emotional stress. Here is how H describes her motivation for going singing:

H: "In that kind of place, sometimes, you need to release your emotional stress. You can go there and scream and shout. It doesn't matter, because it's a room, you can scream and shout there. But if you are with your friends, then, your friends have to bear with that."

Since these girls all declare they do not watch television very often, their experiences or impressions about the songs are structured by their experiences in KTV. As a result, their choices of favorite songs are partly determined by the songs themselves (the melodies and the lyrics), partly by the music videos shown in KTV parlors, and partly by their experiences in sharing the songs with their friends. Here is an example of how KTV music videos, as well as the experiential experience of sharing songs with friends, influence the girls' choice of songs:

B: "When I feel bad, I like to hear sad songs. It depends on how I feel. Like "Annie", I like it very much. You know, the way you feel about it... and the narration on MTV, it is very good."

Y: "What's the MTV about?"

B: "I forgot." (C joins in the discussion now)

C: "Annie? It's about the girl, the couple, they are on the motorcycle first, they are very close at first. And then, when they separate, the girl feels so sad, so she goes to the place they used to go all the time to think of him.

B: My male friends taught me how to sing this song. At first, I could only sing a few lines, and then, the boys taught tile to sing it. So, now, I know how to sing "Annie." After that, whenever I go singing, I ask the boys to request Annie, and then we sing together."

Since singing constitutes a very important part of the girls' experiences with music, it thus becomes necessary that the songs be "singable." For the girls, the criteria for a good song are that it should be, first, melodically pleasant and lyrically meaningful, and, second, "singable." Thus, the girls' selection of their favorite songs is influenced by the range and quality of their own voices. Due to the popularization of KTV in Taiwan, singing has become an important activity in youth's leisure activities. The girls I know all love singing. Their experiences of going to KTV structure their experiences with music, and thus, determine their selection of music. As a result, the context of singing in a KTV — the images from the music video, the songs, the people, and the atmosphere at that particular moment — all determine their experiences, and thus, their impression of the music.

THE POLITICS OF PAYING THE BILL

KTV is a place for boys and girls to get together and sing. Since going to KTV is an expensive activity, I inquired about the bill. To my surprise (maybe I've been trained by western thought for too long, so I forget about our "tradition"), all these girls answered in a taken-for-granted manner, "Of course, the boys pay the bill." However, the result of the boys' paying the bill is to diminish the girls' power to make decisions. Here is how the girls describe the payment and the decision-making power:

U: "Sometimes we went there several times a week. But you know, we don't pay the fee 'cause we are girls."

Y: "What songs do you request when you go singing?"

B: "Only the boys request the songs. We don't do that. If we like to sing a particular song, we just ask the boys to request it."

These girls take it for granted that the social convention of boys' paying is natural. They are not aware that by not paying the bill, they lose their decision-making power, and, in a way, they perpetuate gender inequality in their relationship with boys. Even though the girls know that only boys get the power to request songs, the girls all take this fact as natural and do not question the validity of the boys' power.

Actually, the fact of men paying the bill when going out with women is an extension, a reflection, and a result of gender inequality in a society. Traditionally, it is men who have to take responsibility for supporting their families. A woman's

job is to stay home and take care of her husband and children. Because of the sexual division of labor due to biological differences, when men work, they accentuate the importance of their being breadwinners by putting down women's work as unproductive. To hold their power and maintain it, men constantly have to put women in a disadvantaged position. As a social convention, the girls are willing to give up their power only because it seems "natural" to do so. And by such small gestures, the girls grow accustomed to their inequality.

DANCE CULTURE

Unlike KTV centers, which are places for boys and girls to get together, dancing halls (for disco dancing) are places for girls. Girls like dancing. For girls, dancing is a kind of sport, a way to lose weight, an activity for socialization, a way to kill boredom, and an activity for releasing their built-up emotions. Dancing halls traditionally carry the connotation of corruption. Only "bad" girls go to dancing halls because the sensual movement of the body contributes to a process of building up tense emotions which could lead to the act of sex. Although the connotation of dancing halls changes with the times, it still connotes a place where "good" girls do not go.

All but one of the girls in the group consider dancing a healthy and legitimate activity, and they see nothing wrong with it. However, they won't let their parents know they have gone dancing. Dancing is a female social activity. For girls, dancing is "naturally" an activity for women, shared by women, while singing is for both men and women. Here is how they conceive of dancing as a female activity:

Y: "Do you go dancing a lot?"

C: "Not very often. Sometimes. It's really fun to dance. I didn't dare go dancing before, but now I think it's fun."

Y: "Who do you go with?"

C: "Friends."

Y: "Male or female?"

C: "Female. We might have more fun going out dancing with females. Some boys don't like dancing, but most girls like dancing. I go with girls because we can be very crazy together. I go out with boys to KTV for singing. They like singing, so they'll take you there to sing."

Y: "Do you go with boys or girls?"

B: "Girls. No boys will go to that kind of place with us."

Girls go dancing just for fun. Although there are some boys in the dancing hall, these girls don't go there to meet new boys. As B commented,

"Most of the time we are dancing. The only break we have is the time for slow dances, but we go to the restroom during the break."

Perhaps the boys don't like dancing because the distortion of the body in public

conveys feminine seduction. Dancing traditionally is performed by females to entertain men. (The boys the girls know or date are from the south. They are more conservative. B points out that the boys in the dancing hall are from metropolitan areas where gender stereotypes are less strict and more fluid.) These girls, in the group interview, all complained about the boys' reluctance to dance with them.

There are many reasons for going dancing. However, a sense of liberatory pleasure keeps dancing popular among these girls. For them, the pleasure of dancing lies in its sensuality, its total relaxation in the dark. "Nobody sees how you do it." It offers a feeling of liberation from social conventions and regulations. It also provides the pleasure of collectivity, a collective liberation from the social terrain. It's in the feeling that "everybody dances" that the girls find personal liberation. Here is how C describes the pleasure of dancing:

C: "At first, I didn't want to go, because I didn't know how to dance. When I went out dancing, you know, it's always in Taipei, I went out with them (refers to B). They told me to dance with them. They told me to move however I liked. So I did. Well, people don't see you clearly in that kind of light, so if you don't dance well, they don't see you, and you can dance however you want. It's really crazy. So I think it's fun."

Part of the craziness of dancing comes from staying up the whole night and being different from other people. Like singing in KTV, dancing belongs to the night, too. B said that when she went dancing on the weekends when she was in Taipei, her group usually danced till 3 or 4 in the morning. For these girls, dancing is a time to be real "crazy." As has been discussed, the pleasure of dancing is a liberation from social rules. It is a "jouissance."

Roland Barthes (1975) distinguishes two kinds of pleasure: *jouissance* and *plaisir*. *Jouissance*, as Fiske (1989, p. 50) summarizes, can be translated variously as "bliss, ecstasy, or orgasm."

"It is the pleasure of the body that occurs at the moment of breakdown of culture into nature." (Fisk 1989).

The concept of *jouissance* refers to a pleasure coming from an emancipation of the social construction of self. It is a pleasure produced to evade the social order. Thus, it is a carnivalesque kind of pleasure.

Plaisir provides a different type of pleasure from *jouissance* in that *plaisir* is "socially produced." The roots of *plaisir* "lie within the dominant ideology, it is concerned with social identity, with recognition."

"*Plaisir* is more of an everyday pleasure, it involves the recognition, confirmation, and negotiation of social identity" (Fisk, 1989, p. 54).

Therefore, *plaisir* may come from conforming to or reacting against the dominant ideology, whichever is in our interest. The girls' reacting against the school authority by making the teacher upset is a reactionist kind of *plaisir*. Doing housework and being a good girl is a conformist kind of *plaisir*. The pleasure of singing in KTV parlors is also a kind of *plaisir*, for it involves social identification in releasing emotional stress through singing, it involves happiness from identifying

with the romantic love on the music video, and it also involves the pleasure of developing relationships with male friends.

THE MUSIC

The girls' taste in the songs they like is strongly influenced by U.S. and Japanese pop music. Taiwanese culture is a mixture of Chinese, Japanese and U.S. culture. Japan had colonized Taiwan for fifty years. During its colonization, the Taiwanese were forced to behave like Japanese and think like Japanese. Though Taiwan was returned to China after WWII, Japan's influence on Taiwan was already rooted in every part of the Taiwanese people's lives. Japanese influence on music is more visible in Taiwanese songs, which tend to be appreciated more by people in a lower social strata.

As for the U.S. influence, it can be traced back to the cooperation between the U.S. and the KMT when the KMT took over Taiwan. With its strong economic, military and cultural power, the U.S. was totally in control of Taiwan under the name of assistance. Especially with the rapid growth of cultural industries in the post-war era, the U.S. exported its carefully constructed image of "Americaness" through television, films and music to the international market. This image of "Americaness" was needed by the KMT government to carry out the policy of "modernization," which meant Americanization. The discourse of modernization was carefully constructed by the government and the elites to accentuate certain oppositions: Americaness/ Taiwan-ness, progress/ regression, modern/ obsolete, wealth/ poverty, mainlanders/ Taiwanese. The discourse of modernization equates Americaness with progress, wealth, happiness, and a better life. In addition, the mainlanders' status was (usually that of the governors and the elites) elevated to the category of "Americaness" in contrast to the poor and uneducated Taiwanese people. Once this discourse is constructed, everything American connotes "better" and everything Taiwanese connotes "vulgar." As a result, the Taiwanese songs that are appreciated by working-class Taiwanese people in a lower social strata are considered vulgar, and English songs that are appreciated mostly by the elites are considered in better taste.

In the late 80s, there was a political movement against KMT hegemony. The discourse against this hegemony was focused to upgrade the concept of Taiwan-ness and to elucidate the oppressive nature of the KMT. In the 90s, these two forces are still in struggle — Mandarin as a better language" vs. "Taiwanese as a decent language." As a result of this political struggle, the vulgarity connoted by Taiwanese songs has become elevated to the level of concepts involving "rootedness," "nostalgia," and "pastoral."

The discourses constructed by the ruling party reflect the powerful U.S. influence on Taiwan society. In the area of popular music, western music had a more visible influence on Mandarin songs, and Japanese influence was mostly on Taiwanese songs. This has changed with the recent ascent of Japan as an economically powerful country and the KMT's hegemonic crisis. Western influences on Taiwan's popular music (mostly Mandarin songs) can be traced back to the era of political modernization. The rise of the Chinese modern folksongs, and later the Campus songs, show the influence of U.S. folksongs, even though the Chinese modern folksongs initially emerged as an ideological revolution against westernization. The Campus songs, an extension of the Chinese modern folksongs, are the forefathers

of current popular music. With U.S. music's strong influence on the history of Taiwan's popular music, it is no surprise that Taiwan's popular songs are structurally influenced by U.S. songs, especially U.S. songs from the 70s, for this was the period when the Chinese modern folksongs became popular.

All the girls agree that melody is an important factor in deciding the love song genre. A popular song, structurally, should be able to connote tenderness, softness and sadness. The songs they listed as their least favorites deviated from the love songs in content and had melodies that were too "different" from what they have been trained to like. For them, the lyrics also played an important part in reinforcing the melodic connotations and in constructing the songs' meanings.

To these girls, a good song must be meaningful, understandable, touching, and realistic:

Y: "What kind of songs do you think are good? What kind of songs are bad?"

U: *"The songs that can touch me. Besides, the lyrics should be modern, I mean, they express what's on your mind...They shouldn't be just about unrealistic love, I mean, by loving each other to death...I don't like that kind of song. I like the songs that express what's on your mind. By the way, I don't like the songs that I don't understand."*

All of the five girls interviewed liked songs that are about love and separation. C commented,

"All my favorite songs are about feelings, such as heterosexual love and...whatever, anyway, I like songs about feelings. I like sad songs, songs about separation...Sometimes I cry when I hear the songs."

All of the girls also like to watch TV shows adapted from romances, and three of them like to read romances. These girls place love at the center of their lives.

Several sub-themes characterize the theme of heterosexual love. These are the happiness of being together, the sadness of separation (or the unbearableness of being alone), a glorification of the permanence of love and a lamentation on the impermanence of love, and an exaltation of the uniqueness of love/lover. The underlying assumption threading through these songs is this:

"Being in love makes you happy and wonderful. However, love is impermanent, and thus, separation is almost inevitable. Separation means loneliness and sadness."

Therefore, most of the songs glorify the happiness of being together in the past, and they lament the present situation of being alone.

All the songs are written from a first person point of view. The relationships between the narrator and his/her lover are always mediated by the pronoun "I" and "you." The use of these personal pronouns invites the audiences into the "story" and thus invokes identification. Of the twenty love songs, six are sung by male vocalists. These girls identify themselves with singer when the songs are sung by female vocalists; they are the "I" in the lyrics. When the songs are sung by male

vocalists, they identify with the "you" in the lyrics; that is, they identify themselves as the lovers of the male vocalists or any male they know.

Six songs sung by male vocalists are "Make Me Happy Make Me Sad", "It Is Written in the Stars That We Shall Be One in the Coming Life", "Around Winter Time", "I Am Your Only Love", "A Half Lover", and "Annie." These songs present the sadness and loneliness of separation. The male singers and the lyrics are feminized: all the singers are packaged to be melancholic, feminine, handsome, lonesome, and tender. They sing about men's need to be cared for and their loneliness and sadness. Here are some examples:

"In this life, there can be no end to my waiting, my solitary ears, my solitary suffering"
(from "Make Me Happy Make Me Sad");

"Searching and searching...Always searching in vain for the memories...Suffering, sorrow, despair, anguish. I lost you"
(from "It Is Written in the Stars That We Shall Be One in the Coming Life");

"I had never believed that I would fall in love again...At midnight, I always cry and cry, for pretending that I had never had insomnia in a single bed...I know I can only be a half lover for you"
(from "A Half Lover");

"Our love has been going on like this, I find no fault in you, but curse my fate...When I close my eyes, thinking of your love, I can't forget all the promises that we made...Annie, I can't lose you. Annie, I can't forget you. Annie, my whole being cries out to you. I love you forever"
(from "Annie").

In addition to expressing the men's loneliness, the lyrics also express their desire to be together with their women. The men cry and beg for their women's tenderness and love, they even promise to devote everything to the women.

"Please give me a little more space, a little more tenderness. Don't leave me to suffer like this. A woman like you, you make me happy, make me sad. Let me give you all that I have"
(from "Make Me Happy Make Me Sad");

"Maybe parting is not easy, maybe we can't share this life together...We must wait until the next life to begin our love story once more"
(from "It Is Written in the Stars That We Shall Be One in the Coming Life").

Of these twenty love songs, fourteen are sung by female vocalists. The girls identify with the female singers, and consider the lyrics as their personal expression. The themes sung by female singers vary more compared to the songs sung by the male vocalists but still express the idea of love. The themes threading these songs together can be discussed according to these axes: the importance of love in women's lives, the sadness of being abandoned, the confusion and helplessness when being abandoned, the supplication of the lover to come back, the celebration

of the happiness of love, and the dilemma of making decisions.

Nancy Chodorow gives a detailed account of the reproducing of women by women. She argues that it is through mothering that women reproduce women with a strong desire for tenderness, care, and love. In addition, women grow up to be women, that is, women learn to be women by experiencing women's culture — dressing-up, watching TV, doing housework, reading romances, and gossiping about men. As a result, women tend to accentuate love in their lives. For the teenage girls I interviewed, due to their frustration with their families and school and due to their adolescent physical changes, the underlying concept of love means the promise of heterosexual love. Thus, for them, without love, their lives become nothing, meaningless. This accent on love is expressed in the lyrics:

"They say falling in love with you is the biggest mistake in my life, but before falling in love with you, what did I ever do that was right?"
(from "Falling In Love With You Is The Biggest Mistake In My Life").

The moral value placed on virginity and fidelity teaches women to be faithful to men. Since women should be faithful to one man, they need his commitment to ensure a successful marriage and thus, their happiness. However, men are not bound by these rules. Traditionally, men are allowed to have as many wives as they want and they can give up their women for any reasons. Furthermore, women are treated as pieces of property to show off men's social status. As a result, women in love are characterized by both a desire for commitment and a fear of abandonment; while men are always characterized as active in abandoning women. Many of the songs are about the sadness of losing a lover.

"My heart is a flower petal, falling, drifting, lost, and confused. I cannot break free from the feelings that bind me to you"
(from "More and More Sadness");

"How could you be so heartless as to say good bye, not knowing how deeply you hurt me?"
(from "How Many Times");

"I already have your promise, I never thought that you would ever leave me, but now you tell me you are leaving"
(from "Falling in Love With You is The Biggest Mistake in My Life").

Women are supposed to keep their husbands, to maintain relationships. Once their lovers abandon them, they have to beg them to come back. Since men occupy the center of women's lives, without love, without men, women's lives mean nothing. It is because of the unbearableness of being alone, their irresistible desire to be loved, and their search for the meaning of life (which is usually defined by men) that women have to beseech their lovers to come back.

"Love, don't leave me, though you don't want to stay. I know your heart, you have not completely lost your feelings"
(from "Falling in Love With You Is The Biggest Mistake in My Life");

"So I beg you, don't ever leave me. Other than you, I can have no feelings for anyone but you"

(from "You Are All That I Care About").

Romance's impermanence and instability contradict women's desire for eternal love. Thus, love becomes a source of confusion. The lyrics are also characterized by questions of not knowing what to do:

"This love is a mistake, I want to end yet I stay. For love, for you, what should I do?"

(from "To Go or Not To Go");

"Short and sweet or long and bitter, which one do you choose? Which one do you choose? I am confused, not knowing what to do"

(from "Short and Sweet or Long and Bitter");

"Love, don't leave me, though you don't want to stay. What can I do? I already have your promise, I never thought that you would leave me, but now you tell me you are leaving"

(from "Falling in Love With You is The Biggest Mistake in My Life").

To attain eternal love, women must wait (no pain, no gain). To gain their men's love, they have to be persistent and invest their love and youth.

"How long will I go on chasing you? How long will I go on hoping?"

(from "I Think of You Even in My Dreams");

"Searching for your love, painful waiting, you come to me tonight, and I will realize love for you is like an ocean"

(from "Unstoppable Love");

"Nothing can keep me from loving you, no one can stop it. When I want to see you, no wind, no rain can stop me, even if it must be in my dreams"

(from "Unstoppable Love").

In addition to desiring love, like most Chinese people, the girls believe strongly in fate. Life is predestined. In Buddhism, if you do good in your previous life, you will be happy in this life. By the same token, if you do good in this life, you will get a reward in your next life. If you owed a debt in your previous life, you have to pay it in this life. The people around you are all related to you from your previous life. Your parents owe you, so they have to raise you and be nice to you this life. If you love someone very much, but that person doesn't love you, that means you did something bad to him in your last life, so you have to love him and be tortured in this life. Such fatalistic thinking underlies the love songs.

When the girls find they are in a helpless situation, they submit to their sufferings and justify their sufferings by thinking they are predestined. This fatalistic thinking, however, reflects men's privileged position in the relationship. If men abandon women, then it is women's fate to suffer. By attributing everything to fate, women are left with no power for resistance. These lyrics show how women attribute their romantic failures to fate.

"Our love has been going like this, I find no fault in you, but curse my fate. Every moment, I indulged myself in love and you, without knowing

that our tragedy was predestined"
(from "Annie");

"For a person like me, who puts so much importance on love, there will be more tears than smiles. It's like I owe you something in this life, so I never had a mind of my own"
(from "I Dream of You Even In My Dreams").

In addition to fate, the girls also believe the concept of reincarnation. Reincarnation gives people hope, for there's another life in which well-being can be achieved and through effort expanded in this life.

"How long will I go on chasing you? One lifetime is not enough. If we have one more life, then we can be together"
(from "I Think of You Even In My Dreams");

"Deep feelings can not be realized in this life, so we know, we must treasure our love. We must wait until the next life to begin our love story once more"
(from "It is Written in The Stars That We Will Be One in The Coming Life").

Another theme in songs' lyrics that reflects the girls' experiences involves the girls' relationships with their parents. The girls are in a period of searching for social identity. During this time friends become more important, and the family becomes a "burden" or a block to the girls' developing relationships with friends. As a result, their relationships with family members become tenser. This song expresses the girl's relationship with her family:

"You were always with me since I was a child. Thus, I almost forgot that you had loved me so much...You were more concerned with me when I was in my rebellious adolescence. I didn't like to listen to what you said, thinking that you did not understand me. I had already been an independent person for a long time; however, you silently suffered from your anguish...Oh! Daddy, now I know you are the one that I love most"
(from "Dear Daddy").

U relates this song to her personal experiences:

"Whenever I hear this song, I cry. It is about a very rebellious girl, and about how her dad keeps encouraging and supporting her. Sometimes I identify the daddy in the lyrics as my mother. My mom loves me very much. When I make mistakes, of course, she gets mad, but after that, she forgets it, she won't keep it in her mind. So when I hear that song, I always feel like crying."

These words illustrate the relationships between teenagers and their parents. They also illustrate the fluidity of gender identification in the lyrics; that is, the gender stereotypes in the lyrics are not fixed. As Chang (1991) points out, the lyrics of love songs are "feminized", which is to say that the lyrics are all about the tenderness of love, tears, suffering, and yearning for love, yet these "feminized" lyrics are sung by both female and male singers, which makes gender identification ambiguous. Since

gender identity in the lyrics is ambiguous, it offers the opportunity for audience members to fluidly transform the genders of the first and second persons in the text of the song into whichever genders are appropriate for the particular listener. The listener is able to identify with the experiences described in the lyrics regardless of gender. Most often, female audience members will identify with female singers and male audience members will identify with male singers. Thus, in the present case, U. identifies with E, Len-Jean (the female singer of this song). However, since the gender identity of the second person, "you," is not fixed, "you" is identified by U as her mother, whose role in real life is identified with the role of the "father" in the text of the song.

The third theme found in the lyrics reflects the girls' encapsulation of themselves as the young generation. For them, being young means having fun without having to assume responsibilities. They are aware of the temporal limitation of their youth, and thus their fun. They are very conscious of the passage of time and devote themselves to having fun in the limited time they have. These two concepts, the passage of time and the devotion to having fun while young, characterize the girls' attitude toward time, and are expressed through the songs they choose.

Growing up means giving up fun, losing friends. These girls are stepping into the world in a few days. To them, stepping into the world means being adults and giving up fun. U recounts her memories and love of sharing the "crazy" days with her friends.

"'Back Then' makes me think of the crazy days I shared with my friends.
Now the friends are all gone, but I still care about them most."

"Back Then" deals with friendship, growing up, and losing friends. To the girls, this song best characterizes their feelings now, for in a few days, they will graduate and go to different places to work. Here are some of the lyrics:

"Yesterday someone called to ask how I have been, I can't help but
sighing when I think about that time. How many nights did we wander
around together? We talked about life and the future. How many times
did the wind bring about our true feelings for each other? Tonight, I can
only hold my guitar, singing the love stories you wrote down...For me,
friendship is another kind of costume, I don't feel lonely anymore"
(from "Back Then").

To summarize, three topics characterize the girls' favorite songs-heterosexual love, parental love, and fleeting youth. According to the girls, lyrics should be "realistic" and touching. The girls' definition of "realistic" includes not only the life they experience but also the romantic dreams they fantasize. Of the three topics, heterosexual love is placed at the center of the girls' lives. Several sub-themes characterize this love song genre, such as the sadness of being abandoned. In addition to the internal structures and the themes that define the love song genre, the language of the lyrics and the singers' styles are components of this genre, too.

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Working class girls and popular music in Taiwan

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LANGUAGE

According to the girls, language is also a defining feature of this pop genre. The most popular languages used in Taiwan are Taiwanese, Mandarin and English. Most people's native tongue in Taiwan is Taiwanese. They start to learn Mandarin when they start formal education. English is required only when people start the seventh grade; however, learning English in Taiwan is mainly a preparation for higher education. Here is how the girls use language to distinguish "good" songs from "bad" songs.

Y: "Do you have any preference for Taiwanese songs or Mandarin songs?"

B: "I don't like Taiwanese songs, 'cause I don't know what the lyrics are about. But English songs, though I don't understand the lyrics, I still like them, 'cause the melodies are good. For the Mandarin songs, that depends. The recent songs are not good."

Y: "You said you like the melodies of English songs. What kind of melody do you prefer in English songs?"

B: "The dance music. I like to go dancing. If you play the dance music in the dancing hall, all the people will dance together, and that makes you feel good. But if you play the soft songs, nobody will dance there."

Y: "What's your definition of a good song?"

L: "The melody should be good, and then there must be something in the lyrics. I think the songs nowadays, especially the Taiwanese songs, are about cursing people, or they use very bad language. I don't like this kind of song."

The girls prefer Mandarin songs and English songs to Taiwanese songs. Although they do not necessarily understand the lyrics, they still think the melodies of English songs are better. However, as for Taiwanese songs, even though they understand the lyrics, they do not like the songs. In B's case, she even claims she doesn't understand Taiwanese (This could not be true, for she was born in a Taiwanese family and speaks Taiwanese sometimes when she talks with her friends and me; furthermore, her Mandarin has a Taiwanese accent).

The girls' preferences for Mandarin and English songs can be accounted for in three ways:

1. the KMT suppression of the Taiwanese language;
2. the influence of English songs on Mandarin songs;
3. the lyrics of the songs.

As discussed in the previous section, as a result of KMT suppression in Taiwan, Taiwanese songs connote vulgarity while English and Mandarin songs connote "high-ness" and elegance. Taiwanese is the language of the lower social strata. These girls' refusal to like or even to know the language reflects a general ideology about Taiwanese.

A second reason can be traced back to the birth of present popular songs. The origin of popular songs was influenced by U.S. folk songs and hit songs. Melodically, almost all Mandarin songs are similar to U.S. songs from the 70s. This leads the girls to like English songs due to their familiarity with Mandarin songs. The third reason is the difference in content between Mandarin songs and Taiwanese songs. Taiwanese songs are folk-oriented, about the lives of working-class people and about the pain that people suffer due to economic problems.

Most Mandarin songs are more about love and separation. That's why girls are more likely to favor Mandarin songs, while boys favor Taiwanese songs. The "realities" constructed by the Taiwanese lyrics are not conceptually important to these girls. Traditionally, women tend to be housewives (even though it is not necessary), so women are not responsible for the economic problems of the family. Thus, they are less oriented to the social world outside, and less likely to like Taiwanese songs. On the contrary, boys tend to like Taiwanese music, for traditionally they are forced to take on the role of family breadwinner. Therefore, they are more aware of (or internalize) the hardships of being a worker for their whole life.

According to the girls, if the song is sung by a "good" singer, even if they do not particularly like the song, they will not actively dislike it. However, if a good song is sung by a bad singer, the song is considered bad. The definition of a good or bad song depends on the singers' dress styles and the songs they sing. In Taiwan, a singer's style (including his/her style of dress and the songs) has the defining power of a genre, for the singers are packaged by the industry to target a particular segment of the audience.

As a result, the girls' definition of a good singer is influenced by market stratification. A good singer should sing songs that express the girls' personal feelings, which are mostly about love and separation. Singers who do not sing songs that express their personal feelings, such as Chow Lun and the Three Little Tigers team, fall out of the genre, for they sing "childish" songs targeted at elementary or junior high school students. Singers targeted at college students are excluded from the girls' preferred genre, too. For example, Chi Yu, Tsai Chin, and Chen Su-Hua are very popular among college students, however, the girls express their apathy toward these singers. B commented:

"Yeah, some of their songs are good, but I don't listen to them. They

don't release albums very often."

The components of "good" lyrics have been discussed in the previous section. In addition to the type of songs s/he sings, a good singer should bear a certain personal style. Since the girls identify with the songs sung by female singers, they also identify with the singers' style of dress. For example, U expressed her identification with the singer's style of dress by imitating how the singer dresses herself:

"I like E Len-Jean's style (see picture D). She is young, lively, and outgoing. She looks very modern. I imitate her style."

Female singers who do not meet the girls' taste in style are excluded from the genre. For example, Pan Mei-Chen sings love songs, but she does not dress in a feminine way. Most of the girls express their dislike for her. B commented:

"Pan's songs are OK, her songs are sad, and she has a good voice, but I don't like her. She dresses like a neuter. That gives me a strange feeling."

CONCLUSION

Music plays different roles in the girls' lives. It functions to get rid of boredom. It provides pleasure, a tool for socialization, and a means of personal expression. Appropriating music in their lives, from the girls' viewpoint, means empowerment. Using loud music in the dorm to upset the supervisor undermines the supervisor's authority. The girls show their dissatisfaction and boredom with school by listening to walkman in class and singing during the break time.

Music also functions as a source of pleasure. The girls imagine the male singers as boyfriends who can satisfy their need and desire to be loved and taken care of. The girls identify with female singers who express the girls' personal feelings and their need for love. Dancing wildly in the dark is a way of releasing pent-up emotions accumulated from school, family and workplace. Singing is also a way to meet and socialize with boys. The act of meeting boys gives the girls a chance to experience the pleasure of fulfilling their fantasies.

The girls' use of music inherently produces values counter to the dominant authority. Counter values involve a process of inversion whereby the original socioeconomic limitations and devaluations of a subordinate group are addressed through certain cultural forms, and then are transformed by the group into something of value to the group. (Radway, 1991) Music is used to produce counter values in the sense that it is used explicitly to undermine authority and implicitly to fulfill the girls' fantasies. The fantasies express the girls' dissatisfaction with the impossibility of getting tenderness and permanent love from men in real life.

However, it is inherently dangerous for the girls to articulate frustration through cultural consumption and reappropriate the meaning of consumption to their own advantage. Through cultural consumption, the girls

"also act on cultural assumptions and corollaries not consciously available to them precisely because those givens constitute the very

foundation of their social selves, the very possibility of their social action" (Radway, 1991, p. 210).

For example, going to KTV with boys is a way of getting pleasure, and having the boys pay for them eliminates the girls' financial problems. However, the fact of the boys' paying the bill for the girls perpetuates the traditional sexual division of labor, which works to confine women in the domestic sphere. This custom indicates a way in which the girls internalize and thus perpetuate their own oppression by men.

By indulging in fantasies about themselves as the actors of sad love stories or identifying with the lyrics about abandonment, the girls are preparing themselves to be in a subordinate position in their future relationships. The girls see themselves as providers of love who have to take responsibility for maintaining relationships. Since the lyrics emphasize the importance of love as the sole source of meaning in the girls' lives, the work of maintaining a relationship becomes the "only" job the girls see as important in their lives. Thus, when the girls are abandoned, which the songs see as normal, the songs tell them that they have to beg the men to come back and put themselves in a subordinate position. Emotional attachment to lyrics which consider men the source of life's meaning blinds the girls from seeing other alternatives for defining their lives. Also, blaming love's failure on fate and blaming women for mistakes made in previous lives (thus, having to return "the debt" to men in this life) can make it seem like women cannot escape relationships, even if they are being treated unfairly, if their lives are predestined.

As a result of my study, I find that the girls' consumption of popular music has contradictory effects. On the one hand, their consumption is an act of empowerment. On the other hand, consumption becomes a way of perpetuating women's inequality. I face a theoretical and ethical dilemma in making a definite conclusion. Postmodernist feminists argue for placing value on women's differences, on femininity, and on women's experiences. Women's experiences have been strategically relegated to soap opera culture or gossip culture, those areas traditionally considered low culture by men. Validating women's experiences means recognizing men's domination and making women's experience visible.

However, it should be noted that women's experiences are structured by patriarchal power and those experiences carry histories of oppression. If I, as a feminist, value women's differences and thus women's experiences but do not question the patriarchal power hidden behind women's oppression, I am actually perpetuating patriarchal domination. However, questioning patriarchal power, in a way, means taking an academic stand and analyzing how patriarchal power operates to sustain itself through its everyday life inculcation. If I do so, and judge the girls' consumption as a perpetuation of patriarchal power, I am constructing a division between "them" and "us." "Us" becomes high academia; "them," the girls who internalize their oppression by men.

To me, the best solution is to provide two perspectives. My main purpose is to see how the girls understand their consumption of music as a way to empower their lives, and how they deal with their everyday frustration through such consumption. However, at the same time I also try to analyze how, as historical beings, we are unable to escape the social relations that bind us and make us into social beings. If

I am taking a stand, in one way or other, and criticize the girls' consumption as perpetuating subordination, my main purpose is to insert critical thinking into the girls' consumption, to raise the girls' consciousness and let them understand their oppression. The use of music by the teenage girls to get pleasure or to get rid of boredom embodies a valid, if limited, protest. Recognizing this protest, and recognizing women's oppression, we might be able to develop strategies and work together to call for social changes. In Radway's words,

"By developing strategies for making that dissatisfaction and its causes consciously available to romance readers (or the teenage girls) and by learning how to encourage that protest in such a way that it will be delivered in the arena of actual social relations rather than acted out in the imagination, we might join hands with women who are, after all, our sisters and together imagine a world whose subsequent creation would lead to the need for a new fantasy together" (Radway, 1991, p. 220).

As a final word, doing feminist ethnography is a political act. It aims to raise the consciousness of the oppressed, to let them realize their oppression, and finally, to encourage them to take action to free themselves from their oppression. By interviewing the girls, I made an effort to insert some feminist ideas into our talk. However, I restrained myself so as to avoid too much interruption, too much imposition of my own ideas upon the interviewing process, for fear that I might compromise the "objectivity" of the study. I hope to reconcile these contradictions between feminism and ethnography by sharing the final results with the girls. Since the girls do not read English, I will need to translate this work into Chinese. I would like to share the findings of this study with our sisters so that they might understand the predicament they are in and overcome their oppression.

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Hard men, soft men: cinematic manliness

by Marian Jebb

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Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. London: British Film Institute, 1992

Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

In this review I intend to assess and compare two recent books on socio-cultural issues in film: *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* by Carol J. Clover and *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* by Susan Jeffords. The former aims to analyze the meanings generated around gender in horror films of the late 1970s and 1980s, and audience reactions to these messages. Jeffords' book relates the dominant themes during Ronald Reagan's presidency to dominant themes in contemporary Hollywood action films, focusing particularly on the images of masculinity to be found in such films. Despite the apparent gulf between these two texts in terms of subject matter and approach, an analysis of the authors' arguments suggests certain strong relations between gender issues in mainstream and "slasher" or "stalker" movies. The fact that the books cover roughly the same period is important, enabling some measure of cross-genre comparison with reference to external events. They explore how social and cultural issues help to shape any film's agenda and ensure recognition from its audience.

Rather than taking the more usual perspective on gender issues in films and analyzing their take on femininity and feminism, both Clover and Jeffords choose to concentrate on films' portrayal of men and interpretation by male viewers. Cinematic discourses around "masculinity" are a central theme, although what constitutes the "masculine" in such films — physical strength, stamina, ruthlessness, and lack of emotion — may not match the attributes of real-life men. Both authors also discuss the assumption of these "masculine" attributes by female characters, who now fulfill the central heroic role in the majority of slasher films.

In *Men, Women and Chainsaws* Clover focuses primarily on audience understanding of, pleasure in, and identification with the genre loosely termed "slasher." There's a class of low-budget horror films which usually have a numeral

in the title, scorned by most reviewers but gleefully received by audiences of both genders. Such films, uniform and predictable in their format, tend to be clarified by their especially distinct gender role making. The serial killer provides continuity from victim to victim and sequel to sequel and he tends to be a dysfunctional male, ostracized by society, rejected by women, mocked by normal boys and men. Among Clover's plentiful examples are A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET's child molester Freddy Krueger, killed by an angry mob of righteous citizens but returning to take his revenge; FRIDAY THE 13TH's masked Jason Vorhees, preying on sexually active teenagers after drowning as a child because his camp counselors were more interested in each other than their charges; the entire, male-dominated family of deformed social outcasts who run an abattoir in THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE. A recurrent suggestion in such films is that the killer is not only less than human but also somehow less than masculine. He is repulsive to women, and he murders them and the young men who successfully couple with them. He may be a transvestite, as in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS — a mainstream thriller that draws heavily on the slasher tradition — or excessively attached to his mother, as in FRIDAY THE 13Th Part 2, where Jason creates a shrine to his murderous parent. The forerunner of all of these, of course — PSYCHO's Norman Bates — was both.

If the slasher movie's killer is typically less than masculine, its hero, usually female, is forced to become more than a filmic symbol for "femininity." Clover argues that the monster's most resilient potential victim is set apart from her friends by her pseudo-male characteristics.

"The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of her preceding horror and her own peril...She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)." (p. 35)

The Final Girl's long struggle with her male attacker — his voyeurism and occasional lechery (witness the notorious bathing scene in A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, where Freddy Krueger's rapacious metal talons emerge from the water between Nancy's legs as she dozes) suggesting sexual intent — concludes with her proving herself superior to him in terms of intelligence, ingenuity and finally endurance. She rises above her physical weaknesses by means of these qualities, placing herself in the role of hero where her boyfriend, brother or father failed, and the destructibility of aggressive, athletic or powerful male characters serves to blur previously clear-cut gender roles. Clover points out that the Final Girl's status as a loner, her behavior and even her name may set her apart from the film's other girls.

"The practised viewer distinguishes her from her friends minutes into the film. She is the Girl Scout, the bookworm, the mechanic...The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine-not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and

ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself." (p. 39)

These characteristics are established via a system of signs throughout the film's narrative. HALLOWEEN's Laurie indicates her anxieties about dating near the beginning of the film, and is clearly set apart from the paired-off friends whom she alone survives. The heroine of FRIDAY THE 13TH, Alice, rejects the sexual advances of her boss (although her successors in the film's seemingly endless sequels are less determined, and later survive with and because of their male partners). In ALIEN, Ripley is only distinguished as a survivor with her seemingly brutal, yet highly practical refusal to allow an alien-impregnated crewmember back onto the ship. These qualities of independence and resolve indicate the Final Girl's opposition both to her more feminine friends and to her less than manly predator.

While the Final Girl may not always look different to other women, the heroines of certain mainstream action movies which are strongly influenced by honor themes — the ALIEN and TERMINATOR series — exhibit strong, worked-out bodies, proficiency with powerful weapons, and more resourcefulness than their male counterparts.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor are determinedly self-sufficient, opting out of conventional romantic partnerships though both are sexually active at some point in the narrative. Because of these traditionally "masculine" qualities, Clover argues that male audiences can safely identify with these and other Final Girls despite their femaleness.

Nonetheless, a certain amount of confusion around audience identification is retained via the camera's intimacy with the serial killer. Shots from his point of view during pursuit and attack, plus clear signaling of the next victim, lead the audience to anticipate the impending slaughter and even to cheer the killer on. Yet in the final reel of the film, as the tables are turned on the psychopath, the viewers turn their allegiance to the heroine and cheer her victory with as much gusto. As male pretenders are taken out of the running and only the Final Girl remains to engage audience sympathy, her character being far more developed than those of the other victims, the role of hero is effectively transferred to her. In a specific type of slasher film, the rape-revenge movie, the vengeful heroine acquires the status of an icon, and the cultural significance almost of a Rambo.

Susan Jeffords' subject matter and agenda, unlike Clover's, are concerned with the cinematic mainstream and with political rather than psychological signposts. She relates the themes of 80s action films which iconized "hard," fit male bodies and patriotic values to those which characterized Reagan's presidency. The qualities which assured the president's popularity and the ways in which he was/is understood by Americans can be equated with those of action heroes and texts: strength, "masculinity," virility, conservative values and family stability. A figure who embodied the seemingly conflicting qualities of stability and showbiz glamour. Reagan himself had more in common with the hard-bodied hero than was at first apparent. Both were paternalistic figures who seemed to defend "us" — the vulnerable, voiceless public embodied in underprivileged groups, women and children, trusting military troops — from them — foreign entities or internal "bad seeds" who threatened U.S. autonomy. This palatable, physically reassuring facet of conservatism never failed to eradicate the enemy and hence reassure Americans of their country's security and supremacy. Reaganite values were inextricably tied up

with masculinity, and masculinity in turn was equated with aggression, strength, lack of emotion and single-mindedness: the "hard body," in fact, seemingly as invulnerable as the president's own.

Although corrupt or weak figures in the action genre are also usually male — women typically being relegated to the role of victim or romantic interlude — they are set apart from the hard-bodied hero because of their lack of these clearly defined male qualities, or simply because, as "foreigners," they are naturally against the interests of the United States as embodied by the protagonist. The essential task of the action blockbuster is to imply that "normality" has been restored by its end, no matter how great the chaos created by the plot: the enemy is destroyed, the victims avenged, and the hero's status assured. In the slasher films analyzed in *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, this narrative closure is often symbolized by the breaking of day or the heroine's emergence into daylight after the killer's destruction, although his immortality may be hinted at in the closing frames.

Jefford's most frequent point of reference, and one which epitomizes her image of the hard body, is the problematic eighties hero Rambo. Obviously a crusader for the United States, and a defender of more vulnerable bodies than his own, John Rambo remained "different" from the rest of society because of his refusal to enter into the camaraderie of the "buddy" film or the family structure, which is now increasingly evident in even hard-core action adventures. This refusal to participate in either male or romantic bonding makes Rambo a figure who excites admiration, even awe, but little in the way of audience identification. He is clearly not one of "them" — the foreign enemies he destroys — but he is not "one of us" either. But his physical strength, utilized only in defense of U.S. people and thus, implicitly, of U.S. values, renders Rambo the product of U.S. ideology and the opposite of soft-bodied tactics which, Jeffords argues, characterized Carter's presidency. The meanings the three RAMBO films produce create around their hero can, therefore, be compared without stretching the imagination too much to those US citizens produced around their president. The obvious Otherness of Rambo's detractors is the key to this comparison.

"...in RAMBO the initial focus has shifted away from Rambo's individual body to that of the anonymous and collective body of the men Rambo is sent to rescue. In a similar fashion, Reagan, by this point in his presidency, had managed to redefine the focus on hostages/captives that had so mesmerised the Carter presidency away from the individual captives to the general status of American bodies."
(p. 46)

This comparison epitomizes the ways in which, for Jeffords, physical and ideological meanings are inextricably bound together in eighties mainstream cinema.

BATMAN and its sequel, BATMAN RETURNS, can be adopted as exemplifying the intersection of the two genres and their ideologies. Mainstream and hugely successful films with a hard and active hero who battles a series of dysfunctional mutants, their hero's name and role suggest that he too is a mutant rather than the manly specimens who usually undertake the role of the Hard Body. The armor Batman dons, resembling a well-developed male torso, actually protects Bruce

Wayne's soft and vulnerable body, and his reclusiveness and failure to consummate relationships recalls the socially inadequate killers of the slasher film.

Susan Jeffords argues that this problematic brand of heroism symptomizes the differences between the presidencies of Reagan and Bush, and is a product of the films' moment of production:

"As in the Bush presidency, the hard body is being both rejected and embraced, recognized as a burden and as a necessity...as a source of fear and attraction, of goodness and destruction." (pp. 36-37)

The villains of the BATMAN films are far more charismatic than their nominal hero, and the lack of pleasure and recognition derived from Batman's victories set them apart from the all-American triumphs of other action pictures. Moreover, the victims he rescues are typically suspicious rather than grateful, and this affords Batman himself something of the status of victim, unlauded by the society he aims to redeem. Unlike the impassive killing machines of action blockbusters, Rambo and the Terminator, Bruce Wayne/ Batman appears vulnerable to this treatment and to his repeated sexual failures. (In BATMAN RETURNS we learn that Vicki Vale left him after discovering his real identity — like the rest of society, his lover was incapable of accepting the man for himself.) Such rejections leave Batman uncertain and lacking in confidence; his only reliable supporter is the archetypal bachelor companion, the manservant. In BATMAN RETURNS, Wayne's romantic attempts prove doomed once again when Selina, the secretary with whom he shares a mutual attraction, turns out to be his deadly enemy Catwoman, and hence as unavailable as all other women. This pattern is a long way from the sexual success and supreme confidence of, say, LETHAL WEAPON's Martin Riggs.

The notion of creating a harder, less vulnerable, fine-tuned version of man which is mobilized in the science fiction and action films THE TERMINATOR, ROBOCOP and BATMAN and elaborated in their sequels is not a new one. It has its roots in that most gothic of honor creations, Frankenstein and his creation: the intended superman which emerged as a monster. The same description could be applied to each of the above-mentioned futuristic creations. The technology which created them is more elaborate than Frankenstein's reanimation techniques, but the moral is recognizably the same: experiments of this nature, however wonderful the concept, produce flawed mutations. Thus the Terminator is as capable, at the flick of a switch, of destroying humans as defending them; the cyborg Robocop suffers human emotions within a mechanical body; and Batman's inadequacies have already been mentioned. The cyborg, no matter how hi-tech his trappings, is no more than a step away from the accidents of nature which stalk horror fictions — a darker side of the creation of masculinity.

Jeffords comments that the heroes and villains of the typical action blockbuster are distinguished by, among other things, their attitude and recourse to weapons. While "The Enemy" tends to make use of an endless succession of hi-tech guns, infrared, rocket launchers and computer software, the hero and his buddies triumph through a combination of the trusty handgun, brute strength and resourcefulness. (See, for example, THE TERMINATOR, DIE HARD, UNDER SIEGE, TOTAL RECALL, DEMOLITION MAN.) In the slasher film this format is only slightly altered, with the monster deploying a series of increasingly gruesome tools and means to dispatch his victims, while the heroine has to resort to

Yet this, too, is an area where BATMAN departs from established generic signs. The "hero" utilizes sophisticated and futuristic technology, a symbol of Bruce Wayne's vast wealth rather than Batman's crime-fighting abilities. This is a major departure from the original character of Batman, who, although of course possessing the Batmobile and a vast range of other improbable gadgets, was permanently ready to plunge into a fistfight. The new Batman, lacking physical strength and personal conviction, seems unable to succeed at all without recourse to his gadgets. Instead of the bigger, better versions of masculinity offered by sci-fi/action movies such as ROBOCOP and TERMINATOR 2, BATMAN and BATMAN RETURNS provide an image of a somehow diminished masculinity. The central character is unable to align himself with U.S. hard-bodied heroes because of his lack of physical strength and courage, but also because he fails to be accepted into normal social or family life. He is not a loveable maverick like Martin Riggs or even a warrior for justice like Rambo, but a true loner, whose motivation and moral code are highly personal and fail to fit the patriotic action agenda.

In LETHAL WEAPON, as in other "buddy" movies, the potentially conflicting values of family man and hero are combined through the agency of "soft," conventional Murtaugh and his highly independent partner Riggs. While Riggs draws his partner into adventure, thus enabling him to become a vicarious hero, he is stabilized without responsibility through his acceptance into Murtaugh's ideal all-American home and family. Other action films — COMMANDO, DIE HARD, PATRIOT GAMES — unironically combine nurturing and aggressive qualities in their heroes, family men who ruthlessly destroy any potential threat to their stable values. ALIENS and TERMINATOR 2, glossier sequels to groundbreaking sci-fi/horror films, rather than imbuing tough heroes with paternalistic qualities, toughen up their mother figures.

"Like the Terminator, Sarah Connor's character is repeated and inverted in the second film. In the first she was uncertain, frightened and weak; in her rebirth she is tough-minded, fearless, and strong...And while she is focusing on being a super-soldier, the Terminator is working on being a better mom, listening to and playing with the son that Sarah hardly notices for all the weapons she is carrying." (pp. 160-62)

Similarly, Ripley in ALIENS has a set of motivations and aspirations beyond those of motherhood. Although she bonds with the child she and the marines discover, and risks her own life to save her, Ripley recalls the male action heroes who manage to attain both a semblance of traditional family life and the means for physical, proactive solutions to problems. Both she and Sarah Connor, motivated as they are by a "maternal instinct," manage to break free from conventional images of passive women in action pictures. Unlike Batman, these action heroes, their qualities and values, have far more in common with Clover's apparently soft-bodied Final Girl of the slasher genre than with the socially inadequate males she battles. It seems that the narrative roles of the hard body and the Final Girl transcend their gender differences.

1. Another character in ALIENS, Vasquez, is deliberately compared to her male fellow marines and repeatedly comes off best in terms of physical strength, bravado and quickness. As she performs a series of chin-ups, the oafish Hicks calls out, "Hey, Vasquez! You ever been mistaken for a man?" "No," she retorts, "have you?" It's a moment that perfectly illustrates the ALIEN films' almost self-conscious rejection of gender difference.

2. *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, op. cit., p. 31. The issue of male versus female common sense and resourcefulness is neatly reversed in the 1992 mystery THE VANISHING, whose hero Jeff is obsessed by his girlfriend's disappearance. Three years after the event, her kidnapper appears and offers Jeff the opportunity to discover Nancy's fate, but only by going through exactly the same experiences himself. Furious but mesmerised, Jeff allows himself to be drugged and is buried alive by the psychotic kidnapper. His new lover follows him and, on being captured herself, is offered the chance to find out his fate — if she undergoes exactly the same experiences herself. Rita takes a lightning moment to consider and, using the sense her fey boyfriend lacked, guesses his whereabouts. "I'll take my chances," she decides, swiftly KO-ing her captor. This kind of differentiation goes against traditional gender role-making, but fits the picture already drawn of the couple: he's a writer unable to escape his past, she a waitress determined to drag him into the future.

Model for European TV and national identity: assembly instructions not included

by Richard Maxwell

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National Identity and Europe: The Television Revolution. Edited by Phillip Drummond, Richard Paterson, and Janet Willis. European Media Monographs Series, British Film Institute, 1993. 140 pages.

For the last twenty years or so, Europe's club of sovereign nations experienced a profound restructuring of its membership and conventions. From the bottom upwards, within ruling nation-states, eruptions of small nations revived traditions and antagonisms. In some recent cases, these national movements pushed hard to enter as the youngest states in the club. They sought to dismantle the map of Europe that the great powers of East and West had imagined after two world wars. In other cases, small nations asserted sufficient pressure to achieve legitimacy for self-governance and self-representation within ruling nations, though they appear to have settled for a limited sovereignty just short of statehood. Still others, caught in the diasporic flows from former colonies and dependent economies, are dislodged from national homelands and struggle to maintain their collective identity along the axes of language and tradition.

From the top downwards, transnational corporations, with essential support from practically every European state, have erected a grid of commercial, informational and legal institutions to heighten the efficiencies of capital flows, accumulation, and management. The European Union is the name of this regional economic bloc, but more than that, it is also a command to all the new and potential (and older) members within the club of sovereigns to respect the supranational legitimacy of this place called Europe. Added to the command to perform "The European Union!" are a set of disciplinary routines — like the economic and monetary union (EMU) and the exchange rate mechanism (ERM) — which are designed to ensure the synchronization from above of national economic policies. As Eric Hobsbawm argues (1990: 191), it is such supranational restructuring that will, in the course of this *fin de siècle*, coordinate and incorporate the mosaic of national revivals, and it will eventually elide nationalism's historical significance.

This process of social transformation is creating new conditions that will alter the

character of European broadcasting. After holding onto the territorial purview of radio and television for most of the twentieth century, European states lost ground to both infranational and supranational media practices, as well as to new international political institutions. For example, within the older nation-states of Europe, the experiences of Welsh, Basque, or Catalan television enterprises mark a new kind of nationalist expression. And nations emerging in Eastern Europe, some having already joined the club of sovereign states, are just beginning to redefine the national character of their broadcasting systems.

At the same time, supranational policy statements, like the EC directive Television Without Frontiers, try to secure subjective boundaries around European identity in opposition to other macrosystems like Asia and America — the latter being the most prominent bogey in commercial culture wars, as the recent GATT accords testify. In addition, citizen's speech/ expression rights have become more and more an international affair in Europe, as a whirlwind of national deregulation erodes traditional political safeguards. As a result, determining cultural freedoms becomes increasingly a province of such institutions as the European Court of Human Rights and the Convention on Transfrontier Television Broadcasting of the Council of Europe.

New socio-economic conditions give rise to new questions concerning television's role in producing and redefining identity. Europe today is a product of competing interpretations over its value as a social entity. Top-down versions of Europe collide daily with bottom-up visions and practices. Many institutions have been the focal point of this confrontation over Europe's "where and what," but few delimit the debate as well as television. For a couple of decades now, international communications researchers have put together conferences, written papers, and published essays on changes in European media and telecommunications. Among the issues topping the research agenda were liberalization, transnationalism, new technologies, and the crisis of public service systems. Key problems studied in this research include political communication, democratization, economic busts and restructuring, and the social effects of all of these.

Running parallel to these endeavors, scholars proposed cultural studies as an equally important agenda aimed at understanding ideology, the power of discourse, and the alignment of these with durable sentiments of collective identity. Studies of race and racism multiplied, seeking new ways of understanding social conflict and solidarity anchored to cultural identity. Sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies furnished new, interdisciplinary procedures for media research in order to test theories of power, ideology, and identity. And of these, ethnography and participant observation provided welcome insights into the operations of power and resistance at the local level. Eventually, mass communication and cultural identity provided two of the — if not the — main intersecting lines of inquiry about European media.

It is in this context of empirical and theoretical developments that the British Film Institute published the 1993 monograph entitled, *National Identity and Europe: The Television Revolution*. As edited by Phillip Drummond, Richard Paterson, and Janet Willis, this volume presents ten highly readable essays in three separate sections. The sections roughly match the issues of cultural difference and identity, supranational relations in trade and law, and the emerging TV systems in the

former Soviet bloc. The book aims to come to terms with a definition of Europe and "European-ness" through analyses of television and image markets. What unites these essays is a strong commitment to bring the subject areas of nation and national identity to bear on the changing relations among citizenship, communicative democracy, and power in Europe. None of the essays do this by themselves, except perhaps for the background piece by Richard Paterson who introduces the book. As we will see, this problem is not an easy one to overcome.

Nevertheless, this book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of global communication. It was the first book of its kind attempting to furnish an account in which nation and the collective attachments to national identity are treated as decisive elements in building democratic communications in Europe (more recently Farrel Corcoran and Paschal Preston have put together a collection called *Communication and Democracy in the New Europe*). Drummond, Paterson, and Willis have selected and arranged the essays in a way that moves confidently from regional and local to national and international media issues, taking us from bottom-up to top-down discussions of identity mobilization without hesitation.

National Identity and Europe extends analysis beyond lofty theoretical debates and lifeless modular thinking to examine on-the-ground problems of collective identity, political economy, and democratic communications. It is at once a very theoretical collection and one that demonstrates method by doing. Moreover, few books hold in equally high regard such diverse subjects as Welsh teenagers and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; young Punjabi TV viewers in London and Romanian television in revolution; patriarchal Slovene talk shows and citizens' rights in Ireland, Germany, and France. It's not that these subjects are ever associated directly by individual authors; it's that they are all respected by the editors of the book as equally important parts of a complex European identity. That is significant.

In the first section, Alison Griffiths explores viewer pleasures with the Welshness of a popular soap opera in her essay, "*Pobol y Cwm*: The Construction of National and Cultural Identity in a Welsh-Language Soap Opera." She explains how the soap opera, *Pobol y Cwm*, constructs a presence for Welsh national identity around the foreignness of a character, who is doomed by his past to be forever the English-other and by his desire (or business) to be part of the local community. Conscious play with the dialectal differences between northern and southern Welsh combines with the theme of learning Welsh as a second language to put the vernacular at the center of the *Pobol y Cwm*'s delight in national difference. Identity is also marked by other elements drawn from a repertoire of national symbols that includes climate, countryside, and rugby. Griffiths' description of the textual play with felt-nationalism recalls the U.S. series *Northern Exposure*, especially the contrast of the good neighborliness inherent in the rural folk with the imperiousness of the urban-outsider. Griffiths also takes us into the homes of young viewers to examine how their generation negotiates their lived experience with that of the soap, combining a small ethnographic study with an analysis of the ideological work of the national text. A careful and sympathetic interviewer, Griffiths finds that the young audience took great pleasure and pride in the distinctive quality of Welshness and Welsh issues dominating the textual ideologies of the soap. She concludes, therefore, that a

"text does not have as many meanings as it has viewers, but that it invites a limited range of meanings which can be narrowed even further depending on the social make-up of the viewing context" (p. 22).

Like Griffiths, Marie Gillespie, in her "Soap Viewing: Gossip and Rumour Amongst Punjabi Youth in Southall," uses an ethnographic procedure to analyze a post-colonial viewing context in which Punjabi youth watch an Australian soap opera in Southall, West London. Gillespie finds that the collision of cultures furnishes a "playfully combative experience" (p.26), which gives the young viewers a kind of bilingual pleasure in moving between "soap talk" and "real talk." She demonstrates how this takes form in a family viewing situation where one of the disagreements has to do with kids trying to convince their parents that soaps aren't to be read literally — a bottom-up lesson on the realist codes at work in television fiction. The kind of "real talk" that Gillespie focuses on is gossip-turned-rumor. She presents a brief but cogent analysis of the cultural uses of gossip and rumor among Punjabi viewers. She concludes with a captivating proposition based on the application of formalist concepts to her analysis of soaps and gossip. The act of piecing bits of "real talk" gossip into the narrative form of rumor is similar in practice to the way young viewers piece together characters perspectives in order to make sense of the soap opera's world. Soap characters caught up in the rumor mill also help make narrative sense, of course, and cliffhangers invite speculative talk of possible narratives linking "characters and their relationships" (p. 42). Gillespie surmises that in this postcolonial viewing context, it is the narrative form of soaps, rather than identification with the felt likeness of character, which anchors identity to national culture.

Breda Luthar's "Identity Management and Popular Representational Forms" takes a more pessimistic position in relation to the way television mobilizes, or manages, identity. Luthar examines the problem of Slovene nationalism expressed on a popular game show by focusing upon the ideological work of celebrity. Luthar argues that positive collective disposition to the nation is furnished as the game show host suppresses subjective divisions of class and region with a nationalist discourse. "Nationalism erodes the old structures from which" identity was drawn (occupation, locale, etc.) and provides in its place "a life space which is effective if still outside control." Nationalism helps people to forget (as Renan said) and then fills the absence with meanings drawn from its own symbolic repertoire of, in this case, Sloveneness. The result is that

"cultural nationalism can, as such, easily be instrumentalized for various political interests" (p. 46).

The host of the game show is well known to TV viewers. He's a celebrity embodying the continuity of collective memory and the authority to reshape that memory within the national present. The host's ideological work is illustrated by the example of his tendency to interrupt and correct the speech of participants. The act of disciplining participants (and, one assumes, viewers as well) to the literary language of the national culture reflects, in Luthar's terms, an "ethos of obedience" to that culture. It's this ethos of obedience that manages the alignment of individual identification with that of national duty and order. Luthar argues that the inheritance of an older "proletarian habitus" forms the basis of this flattening of identification. For Luthar, a "proletarian habitus" is the "we-group" (as opposed

to a them-group) consciousness awakened from working class experience. Such a "habitus" furnishes a classification system for cultural values in which individual taste and individuality lack prominence.

"It is only this popularly transformed proletarian national 'habitus' that can occupy the privileged place of fictioning the nation into existence."
(p. 49)

Thus the game show superimposes a neoconservative Slovene nationalism onto a "proletarian national habitus," leading to a profound absence of the dialects, accents, and sentiments of the local which, in turn, denies participants access to their individual experience and, Luthar adds, to their "natural behavior," whatever that is.

The book shifts gears with Vincent Porter's, "Broadcasting Pluralism and the Freedom of Expression in France, Germany, and Ireland." This essay clearly lays out the practical problems faced by national citizenries subjected to the European Union's doctrines of expressive freedom. Re-regulation of national policies is creating a Europe-wide situation similar to the one endured in the U.S., where broadcaster's freedom to communicate and sell airtime replaces the informational freedom of citizens. The legislative codes of pluralism propagated by European broadcast regulation does little to widen the broadcaster's scope of expression, says Porter, especially in the area of investigative journalism. Porter argues that two normative impulses define pluralism in European TV policy: external pluralism to encourage more TV channels in general, and internal pluralism to ensure many diverse viewpoints on each TV channel.

Regulation based on external pluralism promotes the multiplication of distribution channels, increasing the economic pressure for broadcasters to fill up the program schedule. At the same time, rules based on internal pluralism entail stricter political vigilance of what is programmed. As general costs tend to increase with bloated schedules, risk-taking diminishes and, with it, so does internal pluralism. These market-oriented policies, then, exacerbate inherent structural weaknesses of a commercial system. And they also force up the cost of production for public broadcasters and public affairs programming in general. In almost all cases, the costs of investigative journalism have outpaced public subsidy and private investment, damaging broadcasters' ability to serve as resources for crucial public debate.

Broadcasters must still provide a range of viewpoints, according to internal pluralism, even if that is made increasingly impossible. Hence public information provision devolves almost entirely to political elites, who provide a cheap though vested source of information to broadcasters. In the name of internal pluralism, the bigger political parties (inevitably Christian Democrat or Social Democrat) end up with greater control over the content of programming, while they continue to loosen controls over the corporate sector in the name of external pluralism. "The new pluralism," in short, has squeezed out most non-commercial, nongovernmental voices. For their part, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights have ruled that individual speech cannot be privileged over corporate speech, making the double bind complete by stipulating that only national governments (and therefore the largest political parties) can decide which corporations will be licensed to broadcast. All power to

the parties and the corporations reduces the broadcast rights of citizens to one: the right to receive (not transmit) broadcasts of information and ideas. And, of course, even this right will be abridged when economic interests of broadcasters or the strategic interests of the main political parties set agendas for broadcasts (pp. 68-69).

The state and corporate front to control media environments is nothing new, according to Stig Hjarvard, who sees it as an extension on a pan-European scale of the old national conservative resistance to a critical public sphere. As Hjarvard argues in "Pan-European Television News: Towards a European Political Public Sphere?" the push for supranational legislation and institutions only heightened an enduring problem in public service systems: namely, how best to ensure citizen access to the political public sphere through national mass media. In taking this problematic to the supranational level, Hjarvard shows how Pan-European broadcasters have inherited old obstacles — in part already outlined by Porter — which can seriously harm progressive policies of media democratization. Hjarvard makes the sobering argument that supranational media space actually opened up in Europe long before there was any talk of "television without frontiers," rejecting the idea that there is some naturalistic evolution from national to international broadcasting, with satellites as the sufficient condition of growth.

Hjarvard instead shows how the cold war impulse generated a de facto international TV structure from the 1950s to the present. Nevertheless, the main task of the present period, he says, is to describe and prescribe effective political organizations that would make a reality out of the still inchoate European electronic public sphere. Hjarvard argues that the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is the only viable candidate, since it enjoys some legitimacy as a defender of public service principles. And unlike national organizations, which are simply ill-suited, the EBU has a record of playing on the global stage. Hjarvard furnishes evidence to show, like Porter, that political powers and market forces combine to limit in practice the ideal of a European public sphere; an ideal that says that communications should simultaneously respect national difference while expanding the space of public participation in transnational politics and decision-making.

This middle section of the book ends with Toby Miller's "National Policy and the Traded Image." We are now confronted by supra-European relations and the role of superpower domination in the international economy. Miller takes us to that very messy place called the GATT, or General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and shows how this moveable braintrust of transnational corporations is perhaps the most important center of operations for European cultural policy today (more precisely, cultural industry policy). Recent outcomes in the GATT accord have proven Miller right, as the already powerful French attempt to save their audiovisual and information-based industries from the onslaught of the even more powerful U.S. industries. With the explosion in the 1980s of trade in services, national regulation of media and information industries faced a veritable juggernaut of global deregulation. At the helm of the juggernaut was the U.S. government whose protectionist attitude toward U.S.-based transnational corporations was couched in an Americanist claim of unassailable entitlement to free trade. Miller confronts this historical irony in the context of the cultural impact of the traded image on national cultural communities and finds as many

holes in the nationalist rhetoric as in the free trade propaganda. Instead, Miller synthesizes and criticizes attempts to rethink global culture in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and of those Miller calls the "sacerdotal celebrants of subcultural resistance" (unnamed). According to Miller, both offer useful starting points, if from somewhat opposed positions. Miller says in summary that the terms of debate are still in a formative moment, full of many paradoxes and contradictions that muddy analyses of global communications.

The final section of the book examines events in Eastern Europe, beginning with the essay by Pavel Campeanu, "Romanian Television: From Image to History." Campeanu argues that the proliferation of antennae designed to receive foreign broadcasts became one of the most important political events to presage the end of the Ceausescu regime. Campeanu sees the reception on such a grand scale of international information sources as a mass act of disobedience.

"It was this spontaneously co-ordinated resistance which inflicted the first public defeat on the dictatorship, and although apparently insignificant, it was historically productive" (p. 113).

As Campeanu tells it, only after the audience reacted to television repression with a television rebellion — challenging xenophobic laws and the state's monopoly over audience attention — did the state broadcasters feel heroic enough to join the resistance. During the upheaval of December 1989, Romanian TV, along with the foreign sources, broadcast images of the revolution. In response, state security forces attacked the offices of state TV which, to defend itself, broadcast an "appeal to the audience to rescue the television centre and its staff." A few hours later

"the building was surrounded and protected by a huge crowd whose only weapon was its magnitude" (p. 115).

Sergei Muratov, in "Television and Glasnost: Television and Power," takes up the issue where democratic transition begins. He shows how the many paradoxes of transition can be played out in and around the central presence of state television. This was still Gorbachev's *perestroika*, where the problematic democratization of the Soviet Union's television system was best illustrated by a striking contrast between new live-programs — which opened up the screen to audience participation — and the censorious and tendentious reporting of state violence in Lithuania. Muratov shows that democracy can not easily be codified by simply splitting programming along an imposed line of official versus alternative viewpoints. The future of democracy and communication freedom, concludes Muratov, lies in the audiences, who are slowly coming to realize that they are "not simply an object but the subject of broadcasting" (pp. 122-123).

Despite this populism, the book takes a curious turn to an insider's view of Soviet TV. Eduard Sagalayevev writes of his experience as the head of the news service on Soviet TV in his essay, "News on Soviet Television: Breakthrough to Independence." He reiterates Muratov's account of a television system determined to superimpose the image of a strong Soviet State over the daily realities of its disintegration. Sagalayevev recounts the aims of the TSN, the Television News Service, that he helped found. He says by opening up news production to the greatest number of independent foreign and domestic sources, TSN provided more than a fresh perspective on the world as its news became antagonistic to the official

reports. Eventually, political elites closed in on TSN and "modified" it. Sagalayev gives a very reasonable account why private TV, that is non-state TV, should be so appealing in circumstances where the public authorities were fated to be small-minded bureaucrats obscenely beholden to state patronage. Sagalayev, like Muratov, wrote before the break-up of the Soviet Union; he understandably lacked evidence that a free market system would limit freedom of expression within a private company. For that reason perhaps, Sagalayev concludes by telling of his dream to start joint-stock companies and independent consortia in order to achieve, as he says, "genuine independence."

Finally, Daphne Skillen gives us her "Afterword: Television in Russia and the CIS since the Coup." This is Yeltsin's time, a time when this "reformer" held political control over Russian TV, the second national TV channel, making Yeltsin's opposition to the status quo more visible. Russian TV and other sources were shut down during the attempted coup of August 1991, leaving on air only the central state channel at the military-occupied Ostankino Center. Similar to the Romanian broadcasters before them, the reporters and editors at the central state TV nevertheless chose to show a mix of glimpses and full views of resistance against the doomed coup, despite orders from the top management. The Moscow White House became the focus of symbolic struggle and Yeltsin the symbolic hero. With the dismantlement of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Commonwealth, the central broadcaster's brief was rewritten. Skillen can only speculate, but an aura of centralism and political control still plagued the Ostankino Center at the time she wrote "that if politics doesn't kill television, the market will" (p.136), reflecting also the negative impact that new market forces were already having.

One of the most difficult tasks of reviewing this diverse collection is coming up with workable suggestions that link the institutional analyses with accounts of the local play of solidarity, identity, and revolt. Top-down and bottom-up interpretations of collective experience and identity are hard to imagine united, except in competition with each other. There are some pretty clear reasons for this difficulty. Among the approaches represented in this volume are theoretical obstacles, implicit methodological quarrels, and idiomatic incoherence. The reader can perhaps imagine Dr. Porter befriending Welsh or Punjabi teenagers in order to determine their delight or identification with the institutional importance of investigative journalism in European television. Of course, such an interdisciplinary scene today might seem to many like something Alice could have encountered in Wonderland. Nevertheless, I'd like to conclude this review by considering possible bridges in and between the essays of *National Identity and Europe: The Television Revolution*.

It would be interesting (not to say more dialectical) to find structural connections between Welsh or Punjabi viewing pleasures and the wider legal, political, and economic relationships obtaining in European communications. Griffiths and Gillespie cannot be faulted for failing in this regard — their premises were elsewhere. But I wonder how their analyses could be extended beyond the local and the particular without doing damage to their stated aims. Griffiths speculates that new technologies and deregulation may have adverse effects on the distinctly national character of Welsh language TV. This is directed at the question of the impact of transnational processes on nationalist TV. It does not query the function or fate of nationalist practices within transnational processes. Marie Gillespie

promised to examine the wider context of integration of diasporic nationalities in Britain, though she couldn't make the connection plain. The sense she gives is that Punjabi viewers stay Punjabi despite non-Punjabi TV, Britain be damned. While Gillespie doesn't address the problem of identity mobilization for a ruling nation, she does indirectly show that TV content cannot easily integrate the ruling nation's symbols of identity into the lives of all peoples within a nation. The culturalist impulse in the essays, though revealing of the richness of ordinary life, approaches local media uses and global media operations as if these were exterior to one another; making it inevitable that the authors find weak cultural ties binding neighborhoods to nation-states and these to the supranational union of European states.

Both essays suggest, however unintentionally, that surveillance of difference is the *sine qua non* of European TV's reorganization of unity out of diverse national identities. The surveillance of cultural difference is worth analyzing in more depth to locate decisive structural relationships, as opposed to mutually exclusive interactions, between local media audiences and the wider European media environment. Viewing contexts can be conceptualized dialectically as part of the power structure of European informational economies dominated by transnational corporations through global grids of telecommunications, marketing, and advertising. We know, for instance, that consumer research stretches from Lapland to Crete, and we know that this institution makes difference and identity into salable informational goods. Marketers aim to sell information about local taste cultures to the transnational advertisers, making the ordering of national desire one of the goals of TV programs and global sales efforts. Market research is a practice that thrives on resistance, or weak cultural ties, between local cultures and global merchants. It wouldn't exist but for the structure that brings into conflict the values of local and global forces. This raises a crucial point about how nation-identified pleasures support or oppose the reorganization of imperialism in the age of globalization.

In the 1980s, the Basque and Catalan regional governments in Spain established their own television systems, but unlike the Welsh they bypassed central government controls to seek support from transnational firms (in international hardware and program markets). Small-nation nationalist television in Spain emerged hand-in-hand with the globalization of broadcast laws and industries. In fact, deregulation of (admittedly weak) traditional safeguards protecting Spanish cultural industries found one of its strongest supporters in the regionalist movements. Transnational media firms now dominate the Spanish television industry, and indigenous production is totally dependent on foreign largesse and corporate communications. Why didn't small-nation nationalism, *per se*, oppose the imperialism of transnational corporations in this episode of Iberian history?

Nationalist interests alone are not enough of a challenge to imperialism, as Aijaz Ahmad (1992) pointed out in his famous polemic with Jameson. Without the structural interests of the working class at heart, the objective force of nationalism is too limited to be an effective opponent of imperialism (though tragically it can devastate local populations). The Welsh historian Gwyn A. Williams makes the point this way:

"it is the contradictions of an imperial capitalism we are dealing with,

not those of one of its satellites" (1982: 197).

The premise, then, that cultural imperialism might suffer from weak articulations (what used to be called relative autonomy) between local cultures and global capitalism proves false. If we are concerned with the persistence of Welsh, Basque, Catalan, or other local viewing pleasures, we must also be on the lookout for the presence of a political consciousness that opposes imperialism in all forms.

Class analysis offers one way to account for and interpret the structural connections between national identity and the supranational formation of a European television environment. The essays by Porter, Hjarvard, and Miller point to the force of class interests that motivate entitlement claims to make universal laws and conventions under which Europeans will be asked to live. Punjabi youth, or TV viewers generally, can appeal to European courts for greater representation in media and politics; this is the "global village" where "global rules" protect "global rights." The key issue, of course, is that the rules are being made by big, rich political parties who differ little in class orientation from the big, grotesquely capitalized, transnational corporations whose rights are favored by the rules. This issue is news that needs to be reported, but, as Porter shows, it is precisely the news rarely reported by broadcasters who are dependent on commercial or political patronage. The operations of political economy, whether of the media or more broadly of capitalism, always appear far away from local spheres of political action, that is, until the connections are made. Perhaps that explains why independent investigative journalism is privileged by Porter and Hjarvard as the democratic connector of global processes to local action. The rationale for this demand is clear, but this approach privileges free investigative journalism at the expense of other forms of communication, which are as necessary and dear to democracy as uncensored reporting.

The "European" story needs telling, and there are many forms in which it can be told. In this book, as in the field of communication and cultural analysis generally, the disciplinary divide between textual-ethnographic and institutional research seems to impose a wedge between work on fun-stuff and serious-stuff. Nor is it helpful to suggest that the information-focus is simply elitist while the entertainment-focus is not, as anybody reading analyses of film and TV in these pages will know when they get stumped by an exclusionary, specialist jargon. The point is that critical and normative analyses of democratic communications cannot afford to stop at journalism. Independent investigative journalism is an important test case for understanding the fate of expressive freedom throughout Europe generally, and what happens to broadcast journalism is a sure marker of more general trends, as we know all too well in the U.S.

Still, transnational restructuring has important implications throughout the national spaces of cultural expression, and transborder legal powers affect the independent sectors of non-journalistic, audiovisual production too. As the Basque and Catalan example illustrates, without the working class's structural interests at heart, nationalist and supranationalist regulation work in harmony to diminish citizen freedoms in the area of so-called entertainment production as well. As the essays in the middle section of *National Identity and Europe* suggest, the institutional provisions for pan-European freedom of expression are already under threat of capture by the nation-crats and Euro-crats from the large political parties

and by the specialist management teams of transnational media firms. This is a problem that all media professionals, activists, film and videomakers, will want to confront wherever they live in Europe.

Finally, the essays on the role of the media in Eastern Europe present a kind of "shoot-em-up" trope for the subject that unites all the essays in this volume: the television revolution of the book's title. This trope of revolutionary anarchy was common two years after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, just after this collection of essays was issued in the fall of 1993. Yeltsin had successfully managed another coup (was it his second or third coup?), and again, the Ostankino Center became the focus of political passions gone berserk. On TV, Yeltsin's Moscow stood in for the "Commonwealth," free markets stood in for the democratic future, and the government which stood for an anachronistic past was shot out of parliament. The democratically elected parliament, the opposition to Yeltsin that comprised a significant portion of national and regional leaders, never gained access to television. And all through the episode, international viewers could safely watch this shoot-em-up on CNN as democracy beating anarchy. The popular and professional communicators' inertia against state television, described in the last section of *National Identity and Europe*, had finally spilled over into more than symbolic reaction against the transitional state itself, a possibility left unexamined by the last three essays. It's unfortunate that the future impact of private ownership, along with a more dialectical view of the longterm problems of political transition, were beyond the purview of these accounts.

It's easier to imagine overcoming the divisions of issues and of approaches contained in this book than it is doing actual on-the-ground research on European media. This book defines the problems of "Europe" and "European identity" as an aggregation of so many particular instances of local or national contact with supranational law, TV programs, trade, and so on. We are left to wonder if it is possible, or even desired, for a universalizing institution — legal, program-producing, regulatory, etc. — to order the lives of European subjects within the boundaries of a supranational identity. There is one unsettling categorical division implicit in this book as well. Political identity gets anchored to a battle over the interpretation of rights while cultural identity is tied to soap operas and traditional forms of expression. In addition, individual psychology, collective action, and symbolic repertoires are treated as equally good points of departure for understanding identity. There's no reckoning with the question of thresholds and qualities of social communication that succeed in inviting individual or group identification with others in imagined communities of a nation or a European Union.

Richard Paterson introduces this book with a helpful essay in which he points to some answers for this conundrum, though it must be said that he points most forcefully to the fact that we know too little about this mixed bag of problems to furnish any sure-fire conclusions. As he puts it, these

"conflicting views necessitate an extension of our analytical framework in the face of the march of history" (p. 6).

The next task for international communications research, then, is to find a way to assemble the competing arguments about transnational media and national identity into a coherent framework — the question is how. I have suggested that an

approach based on class analysis of structural inequality in imperialism offers one way to make bridges without losing either culturalist or institutionalist directions and desires. But then again, the times may call for books like this one, where readers confront contradictions and paradoxes of social transition; where television, like nationalism, can one day be at the center of revolution and the next be used to dress up and conceal the revived imperialism of transnational rulers.

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Unthinking Eurocentrism Radicalizing multiculturalism

by Ilene S. Goldman

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Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media by Ella Shohat
and Robert Stam, London & New York: Routledge, 1995.

As I wrote this review, the Frederick P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed. Within hours NPR reported that authorities sought two "Middle Eastern-looking" men in connection with the crime. Undoubtedly the car bomb which razed the building and killed more than a hundred people, injuring hundreds more, was an act of terrorism. But why did we immediately suspect the perpetrators to be of Middle Eastern origin? Why did public discourse thrust all Arab Americans in the tenuous position of having to defend their heritage? And, perhaps the most difficult question of all, what does a "Middle Easterner" look like anyway?

On Friday April 21, 1995 in an interview with Paula Zahn, a CBS news analyst raised questions about the media representation of Arabs and Muslims in relation to the Oklahoma bombing and the trial of the World Trade Center bombing suspects. He asked,

"If all Americans see are pictures of fanatics, boisterous and barbarous men and women in veils carrying jugs on their heads, how can they think of Arabs and Muslims in any other way?"

He admonished the press — liberal and rightwing — for consistently picturing Arabs and Muslims in a negative light, for dwelling on the "lunatic fringe." This analyst posited that the press has a responsibility to represent the regular people, too. Positive images of Arabs and Muslims, he implied, would balance the others and make them acceptable.

It is not that simple. Correcting or redressing negative stereotypes takes more than balancing negative images with positive images. As feminist film scholars learned in the middle 1970s, positive images alone do not suffice to undo years, decades, even centuries of bias, racism, sexism, homophobia or xenophobia.[1] These modes of thinking and reacting do not derive simply from news reports and images. Perhaps the images come from the way of thinking. It becomes a question, at the most basic level, of whether life imitates mass media or vice versa.

Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media tackles this problem head on, interrogating power structures as well as the discourses which support and grow from those power structures. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam undertake a prodigious endeavor — the complete rethinking of contemporary media representations and subjectivities through dissecting complex but "commonly understood" terms and theories. The authors destabilize national imaginaries by shaking their very foundations. In so doing, Shohat and Stam take an "adversarial" approach to media scholarship, speaking as scholars, educators, and activists. The book interrogates Eurocentrism as an implicit subject positioning, questions power relations, and examines institutional discourse. The critique of Eurocentrism relies on multiculturalism for, as the authors assert,

"Multiculturalism without the critique of Eurocentrism runs the risk of being merely accretive — a shopping mall boutique summa of the world's cultures — while the critique of Eurocentrism without multiculturalism runs the risk of simply inverting existing hierarchies rather than profoundly rethinking and unsettling them. (359)

In unthinking Eurocentrism through multiculturalism, the authors attempt

"not to belittle Europe, but to deconstruct Eurocentrism to destabilize paradigms which simplify and make Europe a singular source of culture" (1).

The result is an extraordinary and sometimes dizzying unpacking of the "epistemic habit" of Eurocentrism. The range of historical examples, scholarship from around the globe, and the authors' incisive critique make this an invaluable resource for media scholars and academics. Engaging current academic and popular debates, the book defines directions for media and cultural studies at the beginning of a new millennium.

A remarkable array of mass media examples — film, video, and music — support the general theoretical inquiry. Vast historical references complement the analysis of contemporary mass media, producing a work of extraordinary scope. The journey proposed by the authors is long and arduous. Chapter One maps it out with detailed history, analysis, and criticism of the terminology and theories involved. The ensuing eight chapters tackle discrete elements of Eurocentrism, multiculturalism, and their discourses. Each chapter builds on the arguments and examples of the preceding, creating a tapestry which loosely parallels the interdependence of cultural communities at the heart of multiculturalism. The book's uniqueness derives from the connections Shohat and Stam make throughout their inquiry. These connections work themselves out on five levels:

1. temporal (through a history of multiculturalism and of colonial discourse),
2. spatial and geographical (across and within Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe),
3. disciplinary (across normally disparate fields),
4. intertextual (drawing from a broad discursive network, from the erudite to the popular), and
5. conceptual (by relating colonialism, nationalism, imperialism, race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism).

The book's analysis of Eurocentric media interweaves all of these nuances in a rich, readable text. This cross-fertilization will be of interest to media scholars as well as to anyone interested in questions of race, class, gender, culture, and postcolonialism.

These same strengths, however, limit *Unthinking Eurocentrism*'s teachability to advanced undergraduate or graduate classes. The book takes for granted its reader's knowledgeability. The wide range of concepts and textual examples used necessitate some familiarity with them. Some concepts are mentioned only briefly (e.g., "Brechtian distancing," "Manichean binary"), and many films are named but not discussed. This book will complement every first year media graduate student's reading list. It could be incorporated into an introduction to graduate studies seminar or taught in a myriad of other graduate classes. For the undergraduate, however, the impossibility of viewing even a fraction of the films mentioned would make reading *Unthinking Eurocentrism* a frustrating exercise. On the other hand, some of the discussions of genre or in-depth textual analyses would balance other undergraduate readings. For the teacher of undergraduates, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* is a treasure trove. Teachers will benefit greatly from its suggestions for curricular design, discussions of films which might be used in class, and its usefulness as a general resource to introduce multiculturalism into the classroom.

Two definitions underline the project: Shohat and Stam understand "Eurocentrism" as a construct which

"sanitizes Western history while patronizing and even demonizing the non-West. It thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements — science, progress, humanism—but of the non-West in terms of its deficiencies, real or imagined." (3)

Eurocentrism has been "naturalized as "common sense." It originates in former European colonies as well as in Europe and other Western countries. "Multiculturalism," or what the authors propose as "radical multiculturalism," is a term which "points to a debate" (47) rather than an inherent meaning. Shohat and Stam propose

"to prod [multiculturalism] in the direction of a radical critique of power relations, turning it into a rallying cry for a more substantive and reciprocal intercommunalism."

They posit,

"What is missing in much of the discussion of multiculturalism is a notion of ethnic relationality and community answerability...In this sense a radical multiculturalism calls for a profound restructuring and reconceptualization of the power relations between cultural communities." (47)

Unthinking Eurocentrism begins this restructuring and reconceptualization. It does not pretend to complete the task, only to set the parameters of the debate. Situating its argument in a space which encompasses Africa, Asia, and the Americas as well as Europe, the book demonstrates and analyzes an

interdependence among cultural communities. Media examples are drawn from dominant media as well as counter and resistant media. Theoretical insight is drawn from well-known Western scholars as well as from non-Western scholars. Within each chapter the book also offers insights on the possibilities of reorganizing media courses and film/video canons.

At the center of the desire to "unthink Eurocentrism" and propose in its place a radical multiculturalism lies the conviction that most places in the world are inherently hybrid and syncretic. Thus, the narrowly defined and sometimes arbitrary modes of representing those places are not "natural" but come from institutional discourses and power relations. Common knowledge assumes that media representations contribute to identity construction. Shohat and Stam add that since all contemporary political struggles pass through mass culture, media are essential to the discourse of multiculturalism. In shaping identity, media have the power to isolate or to affiliate groups of people. The authors concentrate on discursive practices inherited from the colonial period, summing up a historic trajectory of terms and arguing that despite contemporary concern with multiculturalism, it is not a new phenomenon. (16) Thus the negative image of the Middle Easterner and the immediate assumption that Muslim Fundamentalists are involved in a terrorist act may be residues of colonial and imperialist discursive practices which have long demonized the non-West.

In Chapter One, "From Eurocentrism to Polycentrism," the authors dismantle terms and theories which have long, complicated histories — "West/ East," "race/ racism," "colonialism," "Third World." Examples from literature, nonfiction writing, and cinema illustrate the constructedness of each term, the representational tropes the terms engender, and the ways these concepts have become blurred over time. In setting their exploration's parameters, Shohat and Stam emphasize the ambiguities of terms which are in the forefront of academic thought and popular parlance, especially "postcoloniality" and "hybridity." This largely theoretical and historical material provides the tools with which Shohat and Stam deconstruct Eurocentric media practices. Significantly, these tools cross over disciplinary boundaries. Among other things, the authors draw on film and media studies, cultural studies, psychoanalytic theory, post-structuralism, history, and colonial literature. The dismantling of these media practices helps erase the border between the classroom and the street as well. Shohat and Stam intend their rethinking of media to be political and politicizing.

Chapter Two, "Formations of Colonialist Discourse," lays out the history of colonialist discourse, explicating the shift in representation and relations between Africa and Europe after 1492 and demonstrating what contemporary debates and representations inherit from the past. This chapter encapsulates the book's virtuosity. Stam and Shohat demonstrate how colonialist discourse created a new ideological positioning of the "Other" in order to foster a pan-European imaginary. Cinematic representations, 400 years later, have functioned in a complicitous way to recreate and continue this positioning:

"European cinema, in its infancy, inherited the racist and colonialist discourse whose historical contours we have outlined here. Cinema, itself the product of 'Western scientific discoveries,' made palpable to audiences the master-narrative of the 'progress of Western civilization,'

often through biographical narratives about explorers, inventors, and scientists...Cinema thus became the epistemological mediator between the cultural space of the Western spectator and that of the cultures represented on the screen, linking separate spaces and figurally separate temporalities in a single moment of exposure." (92-93)

Today's representations of the "Third World," particularly in mainstream and counter cinema, grow out of and build upon a five hundred year old tradition of "Otherizing." The primary examples in this chapter are representations of Columbus's arrival in the Americas and the subsequent colonization and conquest of the indigenous peoples.

"[T]he Columbus debate is crucial to Eurocentrism, not only because Columbus was a seminal figure within the history of colonialism, but also because idealized versions of his story have served to initiate generation after generation into the colonial paradigm." (62)

Arguing that "cinematic recreations of the past reshape the imagination of the present, legitimating or interrogating hegemonic memories and assumptions" (62), Shohat and Stam compare the glut of quincentenary images to earlier filmic representations. They also contrast mainstream "Western" films with recent resistant representations and "Third World" films. Thus, discussions include the Cuban-Peruvian film TUPAC AMARU (1984) and the Brazilian films TERRE EM TRANSE (LAND IN ANGUISH, 1967) and QUILOMBO (1984). These discussions complement remarks on CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS (1949), DANCES WITH WOLVES (1990), and the 1992 "commemorative" films COLUMBUS: THE DISCOVERY and 1492: THE CONQUEST OF PARADISE. Renegade and resistant voices, as well as television documentary production, round out the arguments.

Building on the fact that the "beginnings of cinema coincided with the giddy heights of the imperial project"(100), Chapter Three — "The Imperialist Imaginary" — argues,

"The cinema, as the world's storyteller par excellence, was ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nations and empires. National self-consciousness, generally seen as a precondition for nationhood — that is, the shared belief of disparate individuals that they share common origins, status, location and aspirations — became broadly linked to cinematic fictions." (101)

Shohat and Stam examine discrete genres and representations of colonialism therein, particularly looking at the Western and at adventure films. They argue that the twin functions of cinema as science and as spectacle were particularly suited to the project of creating and sustaining national imaginaries, tracing "the imperialist imaginary" from early to contemporary cinema:

"The cinema combined narrative and spectacle to tell the story of colonialism from the colonizer's perspective. From the Lumière brothers' mocking portrayals of the culinary habits of North Africans in *Le MUSULMAN RIGOLO* (THE FUNNY MUSLIM, 1902), through the adventure tales of TARZAN, to the Westerner-in-the-pot cannibal imagery of the 1980s version of *KING SOLOMON'S MINES* and the

scientific missions of INDIANA JONES (1981, 1984, 1989), dominant cinema has spoken for the "winners" of history, in films which idealized the colonial enterprise..." (109)

Television news coverage of modern war is compared with Hollywood films to demonstrate that the colonial/ imperial paradigm continues to exist as a main theme and also as a subverted element. Beginning with tourist advertisements for contemporary Greece and ending with the Gulf War, this chapter proves the power of the media to unite people through the creation of a compelling national imaginary.

Chapter Four, "Tropes of Empire," explores the various representational tropes which underline and reinforce the national imaginary. The authors analyze the role that tropic operations of colonialist and imperialist discourse play in the construction of Eurocentric hierarchies. Shohat and Stam focus on

"gendered tropes that link the colonized to eroticized geographies of 'virgin land,' to the projective imaginary of 'dark continents,' to exotically 'veiled' territories, and to symbolic fantasies of rape and rescue" (141).

They pay particular attention to the representation of women and of the bodies of non-Westerners, analyzing these with a mixture of Freudian psychoanalysis and post-structuralism that at times becomes unwieldy. Here the authors elucidate connections between cinema and history, anthropology, and archeology. Moreover, they make an important link between cinema and another visual medium (though not a narrative one) — cartography. Images of maps and globes lend an "aura of scientificity" to narratives of empire. Through narratives pretending to history, anthropology, and archeology, Hollywood asserts a historical and empirical knowledge. Hollywood's role in writing the culture of others is explored in classic films (e.g. LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, INTOLERANCE) as well as in B movies (ISHTAR, SAHARA).

Lest the reader think that *Unthinking Eurocentrism* is an exercise in Europe-bashing, I should note that in Chapters Three and Four — as throughout the book — Shohat and Stain intertwine analyses of mainstream cinema from "Third World" areas. They contrast mainstream narratives with examples from documentary film and from counter-practice by both "Western" and "non-Western" makers. The result is a thought-provoking collection of observations. The most revealing of these occurs in "Tropes of Empire" in a discussion of "Rape and the Rescue Fantasy." As Shohat and Stain begin,

"The Western imaginary metaphorically rendered the colonized land as female to be saved from her environmental disorder"(156).

The colonizer is the rescuer, saving both the colonized land and the Western female threatened by the "polygamous Arabs, libidinous Blacks, and macho Latinos." Anti-colonialist texts have also utilized this trope, comparing colonization to rape.

"Nationalist intellectuals interrupted the colonialists' exemplary tales of sexual violence and heroic sacrifice by appealing to the actual history of sexual violence and dispossession wrought against 'Third World'

women themselves" (161).

However, Shohat and Stam demonstrate that even this anti-colonialist tack is masculinist if not Eurocentric:

"Since colonialist discourse relied on gendered language to articulate its mission of progress, anti-colonial critique called up the elided history of the rape of Third World women. Thus by positing the nation as a haven for 'our' women, anti-colonialism clung to a masculinist fantasy of rescue." (161)

Chapters Five and Six form a brace which addresses many questions alluded to in Chapters Three and Four. Entitled respectively "Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle Over Representation" and "Ethnicities-in-Relation," these chapters tackle issues of verisimilitude, truth in representation, the "hidden" discourse of race and ethnicity in media, and latent multiculturalism. One observation forms the base for the discussions in both chapters:

"Filmic fictions inevitably bring into play real-life assumptions not only about space and time but also about social and cultural relationships. Films which represent marginalized cultures in a realistic mode, even when they do not claim to represent specific historical incidents, still implicitly make factual claims." (179)

From here Shohat and Stam propose substituting a study of discourse for traditional work focusing on images. They contrast stereotypes with "reality" or "truth" in order to demonstrate that there is no absolute truth. What remains indisputable, however, is that marginalized groups have historically been powerless to control their own representation. Therefore, Shohat and Stam argue, it is crucial to understand not just the representation or image, but also the institutions which disseminate mass media texts and the audiences that receive them. (184) Further, one must read the texts "from the margins" to ferret out the drowned cultural voices floating near the surface. (221)

Two notable ideas emerge here: To begin with, stereotypes of marginalized peoples exist in Western and non-Western mass media, demonstrating the ubiquity of Eurocentric thought. Casting, linguistic decisions, and audience expectations abet these representations. Self-representation is not simply a matter of marginalized people's wresting control of the tools of production and placing themselves on the screen. Shohat and Stam's privileging of the discursive encourages the reader to see that stereotyped mass media representations are "part of a continuum" (215) and exist in relation to other forces. Examining these discursive structures, the reader discovers with the authors that

"Polyphony does not consist in the mere appearance of a representative of a given group but rather in the fostering of a textual setting where that group's voice can be heard with its full force and resonance. The question is not of pluralism but of multivocality, an approach that would strive to cultivate and even heighten cultural difference while abolishing socially-generated inequalities." (215)

The second important concept has to do with the syncretism of multicultural

societies. Shohat and Stam urge scholars to look beyond race and racial binaries (Black/White) to ethnicities within ethnic groups (Jewish or Irish Americans, Mexican or Cuban Americans). They use *The Jazz Singer* to exemplify that

"a relational approach to representation would take into account both a racial dimension-the Whiteness of European-Jewish immigrants-and an ethnic/ religious dimension-their Jewishness." (228)

The population of most countries is diverse and cultural communities grow to be interdependent. Thus, isolated discussions of "race" or "ethnicity" tend to be one-dimensional.

"In a multiracial society, the self is inevitably syncretic, especially when a preexisting cultural polyphony is amplified by the media. This syncretism is first of all linguistic...Cultural syncretism takes place both at the margins and between the margins and a changing mainstream, resulting in a conflictual yet creative intermingling of cultures." (237)

Chapters Five and Six continually link the myriad of racial and ethnic representations discussed to the multicultural society in which we live. They challenge the reader to rethink not only media representation but also her own views about the world around her and how they were shaped. Finally, pages 241 through 245 offer concrete suggestions for introducing multiculturalism into the classroom in order to effect "the mutual illumination of cultures." The authors suggest,

"A relational methodology would also go beyond a bipolar comparative approach between single nations to a more broadly conceived diasporic or transnational approach. A truly multicultural media studies would perform a conceptual 'remapping' of the field within a global space." (243)

Chapters Seven and Eight examine, respectively, "The Third Worldist Film" and "Esthetics of Resistance." Unlike the previous chapters, which untangled discursive patterns in a variety of media sites, these chapters interrogate specific film practices. The concern here is with films made by Third World filmmakers, whether made in Third World countries or in diaspora. Chapter Seven deals with the radical political cinemas of the late fifties through the early eighties. A historical overview of the "new cinemas" which proliferated in the sixties provides the uninitiated reader with a general understanding of theoretical writings and formal experimentation of this generation of filmmakers in the Third World.

Chapter Eight continues the inquiry chronologically, looking at more recent resistant or counter practices. *Unthinking Eurocentrism* makes a sea change in terms of style and rhythm in these chapters. In the first two thirds of the book, the authors mention a plethora of films to support or illustrate many of their points. They analyze or describe some of these films briefly. Here, Shohat and Stam choose to "focus on specific films which exemplify noteworthy strategies with special clarity or flair," in an attempt to demonstrate a "repertory of approaches, in all their diversity and even contradictions" (249). The theory which has been deconstructed and reworked in the preceding pages is here put to the test, resulting in two chapters which read more like a film studies text than the rest of the book.

The reader will welcome this shift for two reasons: First, it demonstrates the methodological use-value of the theory in the preceding pages. Moreover, while the first two thirds of the book root out Eurocentrism in First World and Third World texts, these chapters show that alternatives have existed for a long time. A multicultural approach to filmmaking, as well as to media criticism, seems the best weapon against Eurocentrism. Shohat and Stam note,

"In the face of Eurocentrism, Third World and minoritarian filmmakers have rewritten their own histories, taken control over their own images, spoken in their own voices" (249).

And, perhaps most poignantly, these chapters prove, in the authors' words,

"It is not that their films substitute a pristine truth for European 'lies,' but that they propose counter-truths and counter narratives informed by an anticolonialist perspective, reclaiming and re-accentuating the events of the past in a vast project of remapping and renaming." (249)

The films discussed in these chapters do not simply attempt a revisionist historiography. Some of the canonical Third Worldist films mentioned in Chapter Seven — *BATTLE OF ALGIERS*, *BATTLE OF CHILE*, *HOOR OF THE FURNACES*, *BARREN LIVES* — were experiments with dialectical and political documentary filmmaking. Chapter Eight looks new alternative cinematic practices, including video work. All of the media presented attack Eurocentrism through formal innovation, eschewing or reconfiguring hegemonic Hollywood filmic conventions like cause-and-effect narrative patterns and seamless editing. The documentaries combine various approaches to effect an avant-garde filmmaking with rhetorical punch. These are multicultural film and video practices. Shohat and Stam want the reader to appreciate how they were radical in their moment.

In "The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age," Shohat and Stam posit the relevance and radicalness of "unthinking Eurocentrism" for the classroom. For them, nothing less than "an indispensable re-envisioning of global politics" (359) is at stake. This chapter is not a "summary" or a "conclusion." Rather, it reiterates the cross-references among disciplines made throughout the tome. It renders in pedagogical and practical terms the multicultural grid built in Chapters 1 through 8. Moreover, this chapter specifically adds a deconstruction of spectatorship to the grid. Shohat and Stam argue that no textual or theoretical approach to media criticism is complete without consideration of the spectator. They situate all of this within a pedagogical politics, suggesting several ways to rethink audiovisual pedagogy.

Many the observations in *Unthinking Eurocentrism* are not new. They come from assorted academic disciplines as well as the popular press. Bringing these ideas together in one volume, crossing disciplinary boundaries, maintaining the political voice of activist throughout — this is new and it is laudable. The consideration of colonialist films produced in Western and non-Western countries alike underscores the idea that Eurocentrism does not exist exclusively in European and neo-European nations. It also stresses the fact that understanding media practices can only enhance one's comprehension of cultural and social power structures.

For these reasons, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* is an important book. It is, however, a specialist's book — a dense but readable tome packed with more ideas, examples, and questions than typically seen in one place. Regardless of one's specialty, however, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* is the first truly multicultural, interdisciplinary approach to media, one which is valuable for any one, from the scholar of formalism in Hollywood to the specialist in Latin American feminist media to the political scientist to the historian.

NOTES

1. I refer here to the debate which began with the publication of Linda Artel and Susan Wengraf's *Positive Images: Non Sexist Films for Young People* and Diane Waldman's *Jump Cut* review. (See Artel, Linda and Susan Wengraf, *Positive Images: Non-Sexist Films for Young People*, San Francisco: Bootlegger Press, 1976; Waldman, Diane, "There's More to a Positive Image Than Meets the Eye," *Jump Cut* 18, 1978. Both reprinted in Erens, Patricia. *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

In the introduction to their book, Artel and Wengraf express concern with the media's power to perpetuate sex-stereotyped behavior. Their goal was to foster awareness of alternative images of women and to promote work which "presents girls and women, boys and men with non-stereotyped behavior and attitudes: independent, intelligent women; adventurous, resourceful girls, men who are nurturing; boys who are not afraid to show their vulnerability" (9 in Erens). This book began a debate within feminist film theory that is exemplified by Diane Waldman's response in her *Jump Cut* review. Waldman objected first to the criteria for "positive images" outlined by Artel and Wengraf. She argued that their "guidelines for selection and evaluation" "immediately introduces a problem on the theoretical level: What are 'positive' characteristics and what is the relations of these images to social reality?" (14 in Erens). Waldman also questioned the very notion of a "positive image":

"The notion of a 'positive image' is predicated upon the assumption of identification of the spectator with a character depicted in a film...Yet the mechanism of identification goes unchallenged and unchanged, and introduces, I think, a kind of complacency associated with merely presenting an image of the 'positive' hero(ine)." (17 in Erens)

Subsequent feminist film theory and filmmaking interrogated issues of identification as well as the pedagogical issues which Waldman discussed.

TEACHING AND STUDYING SEXUAL IMAGES

by Chuck Kleinhans

The following article was printed as **An Introduction to a Special Section on teaching and studying sexual images** in *JUMP CUT*, #40.

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This Special Section brings together several articles on the process and problems of teaching about representations of sexuality. In addition, it concludes with an examination of some recent independent films and tapes which take new looks at sexuality. Therefore these articles can serve to mark yet another change in the ongoing controversy about sexual representation in the public sphere: a moment in which academics and artists are diffusing new analyses of visual pornography.

In the current Gingrichian moment, political and religious conservatives seem more seriously bent on punishing poor women and children and removing the social welfare safety net than effectively eliminating pornography, censoring performance artists, or criminalizing flag burning. Of course, such hot button issues will continue to be an effervescent part of rousting the rank and file of the right and playing the Presidential race game. Thus, sex and violence in mass media can always be honked about, especially in film and pop music-arts primarily supported by constituencies that can't or don't vote. Adolescents at risk due to Calvin Klein ads make good pundit fare. And "porn on the internet" can be used to scare parents and sell magazines, but deregulation of communications is the long term norm.

This is not to say we shouldn't be concerned and active in responding to right wing efforts to censor the Internet, decry rap music lyrics, or reduce or eliminate the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. But we need to see that these are often skirmishes in a larger war, and make the connections again and again to global changes. Pedophiles exchanging child pornography on the internet is a relatively small and discrete problem, but are the politicians who are getting so worked up over it willing to admit that World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and free trade agreement policies have a direct and massive effect on child mortality rates, child prostitution, and tourist sex industries in the developing world? How many children's lives are lost, sooner or later (with AIDS and other STDs), by capitalism's insistence on slave wages and starvation abroad and cuts in Medicaid at home?

In the long view, the history of sexual images in public circulation over the past 50 years reveals contradictions being worked out with greater explicitness and greater subtlety. Social forces were unleashed during World War 2 in North America, leading to more opportunities for women, minorities, and gays and lesbians. The consequences of these social changes could not be restrained in the long run. The genie wouldn't go easily back in the bottle. Thus the public artifact of the Betty Grable wartime pinup is the trace of

a hidden government policy decision: to conduct the war without official military prostitution, but to substitute visual pornography supplied by Hollywood. Officially sanctioned masturbation to star images has been left out of the recent wave of commemoratives to WW2, but the legacy remains.[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

Forty years ago **Playboy** emerged and moved the same sexualized female images from disreputable to mainstream, while literary censorship crumbled and allowed **Lady Chatterley's Lover**, the Henry Miller novels, and other sexually explicit works to be published. The so-called Sexual Revolution of the 60s combined a material basis (guns and butter economy, the developing teen market, oral contraceptives, etc.) with political upheaval (civil rights organizing, urban ghetto rebellions, antiwar protests) by and cultural expression (taboo breaking experimental films, underground newspapers, and rock music). As experienced, such a time could only be contradictory and complicated, but there was an undeniable sense at the time that an alternative public space, a counterculture, was being formed.

The optimistic upsurge of feminist and gay/lesbian organizing in the 70s was matched by the petering out of anti-imperialist projects as the Vietnam war wound down and ended, the fragmentation of African-American and political left organizations, and stagnation and retreat by organized labor in the face of Nixonomics. At the decade's start, hard core films emerged above ground, and it seemed that more explicitness in public visual space was the norm. But the end of the 70s saw a backlash with the election of Reagan and the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. As the 80s began, a West-Coast-based feminist effort to criticize mainstream media violence and sexism using traditional pressure group tactics metamorphosized into the New York Women Against Pornography with a high profile protest image and direct action against adult film theatres and bookstores. Soon feminists took issue with other feminists as the "sex wars" debate erupted around questions of censorship and the politics of representations. [See articles in **Jump Cut** 26 (1981), 30 (1985) and 32 (1987).]

By the end of the 80s a new visual syntax for sexuality had developed with MTV's explicit coyness, while the proliferation of VCRs took porn films out of male audience theatres and into the home. The breast implant became as unremarkable a bit of cosmetic surgery as the nose job was twenty years earlier. As the threat of AIDS increased the need for public information on sexuality, Senator Helms and Representative Danamayer tried to halt any sex education except abstinence, blocked research funding on sexual behavior, and took out after the National Endowment for the Arts grants to controversial artists who dared deal with the body, sexuality, AIDS, and other issues. Gradually the art world responded, and surprisingly became more completely politicized than during the Vietnam war. Meanwhile tv evangelists joined the ranks of aspiring politicians who were caught publically in compromising sex.

Today we live in an equally contradictory time, but the connections are much harder to see, harder to make. While the right continues to demonize images, and Bob Dole prattles on about films he hasn't seen, the fact remains that the mainstream media acts out ideas that the right would love to proscribe: lesbian kissing on Roseanne, gay lovers on Melrose Place, K. D. Lang as lesbian chic cover girl. While wringing their hands about the Internet, the congressional majority is studiously indifferent to an increasingly deregulated (and increasingly well-lobbied) cable television market that delivers pay-per-view genital features, a steady stream of softcore drama on Showtime and Cinemax channels, plus HBO's most popular series-the Real Sex documenatries- and sexual selfhelp shows on CNBC and Lifetime that make Dr. Ruth's advice ten years ago seem prim. Talk radio pushes further in gross-out sputters, and talk show tv has become the equivalent of professional wrestling in campy theatrical put-ons of sexual situations. The Blockbuster video rental chain, which started out with an explicit conservative bent (family values promoted, no NC-17 tapes) has followed the corporate logic of technically maintaining a no porn policy but loading up on softcore and ultraviolent action and horror. Meanwhile white suburban boys become the dominant consumers of misogynist gangsta rap.

In sum: contradictions abound in the field of sexual representations. And while the right continues to try to

get that genie back in the bottle, it's perfectly obvious that conservatives' kids, just like everyone else's, enter a highly sexualized public sphere at an early age. The fears expressed by the right about public schools (handing out condoms to grade schoolers!) reflects a deeper anxiety that people have about losing control of their children's space. Since Lyndon Johnson's presidency, the relentless decline of the family wage has forced both parents in those scarce "traditional" families to work, and thus to be away from home, leaving child care to day care workers and television and school. As the child goes from home with mommy to preschool, these anxieties can be blown into wildfire moral panics: witness the McMartin Preschool case and other false scares of day care workers sexually molesting kids. How else to explain the panic belief that Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders was going to institute government mandated masturbation training for schoolchildren?

To consider uneven developments in the field of public sexual representation more closely, we've grouped these articles together. Two British critics, Beverly Skeggs and Pat Kirkham, begin with a survey of recent work in the U.K. and U.S. raising issues around pornography, and then proceed to interview some U.S. women who have taught pornography in universities. The difference between the situation in the two countries is revealing, because in the U.K. no films or videos showing explicit genital activity can be screened. (At the same time, sexual joking on the BBC and commercial tv in Britain is far more explicit than allowed in U.S. network fare.) Thus, even when US film scholar Linda Williams was invited to speak at a conference on pornography in London a few years ago, the actual films she discusses in her book, ***Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"***, could not be screened at the National Film Theatre conference site. (Again, at the same time, a holiday in Amsterdam or Paris can provide a cornucopia of pornography.)

Fear of images erupts in even the most nominally progressive circles when it comes to sexual representations. Case in point: the impressive new anthology ***Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture***, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Duke Univ. Press, 1995) reprints Tom Waugh's pioneering comparison of gay and straight porn from ***Jump Cut*** 30 with an updated discussion of the hassles around the article's original hard core images, but amazingly without the original images. And Waugh's groundbreaking history of gay images, ***Hard To Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film*** (Columbia Univ. Press, forthcoming) by remains slowed down by lawyers and editors anxious about showing penises. On the other hand, Peter Lehman's ***Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*** (Temple Univ. Press, 1993) was published with appropriate illustrations, and Routledge allowed a few male organs to be seen in ***Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Films and Video***, ed. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (1993). Needless to say, we faced the same problems and questions in selecting images for this special section. But the idea that we can somehow talk about, think about, and analyze images without seeing what we are talking about seems truly bizarre when entertainment and advertising proliferate more and more different sexual images.

The recent emergence in higher education of a serious consideration of pornographic and other sexual representations marks an important change in the discussion. Previously such matters were the province of law and speech discussions of the First Amendment, art historical considerations of the nude, and sometimes media studies of European art cinema. The current discussion is heavily indebted to feminist and queer analyses of gender and sexual image material. Because of this teaching sexual images takes on a new set of concerns and recasts old ones.

This became very clear in several events at the 1995 Society for Cinema Studies conference which Ramona Curry reports on and analyzes here. Ironically the conference hotel site, in the middle of the theatre district, was a few blocks north of the 42nd Street porn strip that 15 years earlier Women Against Pornography (with free rent from real estate developers) had organized against with a famous slide show and tour of the combat zone. The net effect of such anti-porn efforts in midtown Manhattan was visually obvious at the conference.

Old porn theatres on 42nd street were boarded up (with artist created poems and statements on the marquees, thanks to an art in public places project) awaiting the developer's wrecking ball and a glorious high rent future. Meanwhile the various theatres, strip shows, bookstores and such had been squeezed into marginal spaces in the adjoining neighborhoods, so that instead of a two block concentration, porn and sleaze was dispersed everywhere. Out of town families walking down Broadway to see the Letterman show or Cats faced a porn theatre every block or so, plus homeless guys on every corner making a few bucks handing out flyers for massage parlors, video arcades, and live sex act clubs.

Following this overview, two articles consider the practical matters of teaching porn in greater depth. Chuck Kleinhans relates his experience with a graduate course at Northwestern University while Kate Kane elaborates her course on the body at DePaul University. Both emphasize the need to structure a good environment for classroom examination of the issues. Finally, Laura Marks takes a look at some recent films and tapes which examine sexual issues with a new frankness. Such new expressions offer new possibilities for representing sexuality and further transforming the public sphere.

NOTES

1. See Jane Gaines, "Popular Icon as Commodity and Sign: The Circulation of Betty Grable, 1941-1945." Diss., Northwestern Univ., 1982.

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Pornographies, pleasures, and pedagogies in U.K. and U.S.

by Pat Kirkham and Beverley Skeggs

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"Pornography is one of the few genres where women are not punished or made guilty for acting out their sexual desires."

— Linda Williams, *Hardcore*

"Pornographic film and video is a hugely popular genre and industry that has been vastly understudied in film curricula. Anti-pornography groups have had nothing to tell us about pornography as a genre or how it figures in people's lives. We, as film and cultural studies scholars, together with producers and consumers of pornography, need to do that."

— Constance Penley

"I just don't understand it. Feminists hate pornography!"

— President of the Santa Barbara County Citizens Against Pornography group commenting on a course in Film and Pornography taught by Constance Penley

We are currently witnessing a significant paradigm shift in feminist discourses on pornography in the United Kingdom. There is a shift away from focusing on censorship and legislation to approaching in a less censorious way issues of visual representation, sexual excitement and sexual practice. Old orthodoxies have come under challenge and are being examined in print, seminars, conferences and undergraduate courses as well as in the practices of pornographic film and video making. Given that we actually know very little in historical, cultural or psychic terms about the origins, impulses, gendering or trajectories of individual or collective sexual desires, drives, fantasies and responses to explicitly sexual visual imagery, we need a full and open debate. But the issues are complex as well as highly charged. Many feminists have contradictory and confusing feelings on these issues.

Because the questions involved have developed at a different pace in the U.K. and the U.S., as British scholars we have especially sought to learn about U.S. experiences. We initiated a discussion with U.S. feminist scholars in this area to help clarify our own positions on what, in film and video terms, persists as an

extremely popular genre within our popular culture. In this light, we spoke to three U.S. women active in "pro-sex, anti-censorship work," all of whom teach or have taught courses on film and pornography. Extracts from our discussions with them follow below, and we will try to place these new developments in a broader context.

A key marker of the new, non-censorious approach with which feminists approach pornography is Linda Williams' *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (1989-USA; 1990-GB). This book emphasizes issues of representation, context and audience; it also calls for detailed studies, such as those in *Caught Looking: Feminism, Pornography and Censorship* (1988-USA), to illuminate the many differences between individual products. Gillian Rodgerson's and Elizabeth Wilson's *Pornography and Feminism: The Case against Censorship* (1991), which hammered home the complexities of representation within the British debate, and *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debates* (1992), edited by Lynn Segal and Mary McIntosh, set forth clear expositions of the anti-censorship position. These books establish pornography as a complex and unpredictable regime of representation. Feminist scholars can no longer be categorical about what pornography is.

British critic Linda Ruth Williams has pointed to the blurred boundaries between mainstream films' depictions of violence and sexual violence against women and so-called trash or porn movies' depictions of "deviant" sexual behavior. Mainstream popular music video has used sadomasochistic imagery to such an extent that such imagery is now considered passé. In terms of genres, the category of "snuff" movies shifts from porn to exploitation to honor, and there has long been an instability between the categorization of "art" movies (especially European ones) and porn. The relation between the cultural significance attached to certain representational forms and the shifting boundaries between art and pornography is well illustrated by Lynda Nead, one of thirteen authors in the recently published *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power* (edited by Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson, 1993-GB). This collection aims to show that issues around pornography are "more complex and more interesting than the censorship lobby allows," and it takes more seriously than many the question of arousal. We do not wish to deny the contributions of those who have argued "pro-sex, anti-censorship" positions since the mid to late 1970's, when feminist debates polarized into two broad camps, each unheeding of the other. Rather, we note the contributions of Linda Williams and others since 1989 in order to focus on a recent qualitative change.

Among feminists, there is a growing challenge to the idea that censorship or legislation relating to pornography is the best way forward for women. This position is still a minority one amongst feminists, particularly academic feminists in the United States, where for the last decade and a half, the feminist censorship lobby (a somewhat misleading term since its aims also include legislation) has been not only strong but also effective. That very success explains something of the urgency expressed by the three women to whom we spoke as well as by others opposed to the anti-pornography, pro-censorship position. Such a position has come to be known as the Dworkin/ MacKinnon orthodoxy, because of its two leading protagonists: Andrea Dworkin (*Pornography: Men Hating Women*) and Catherine MacKinnon (*Just Words*).

We should not forget the positive impulses which drew so many good women to the Dworkin/ MacKinnon camp — a concern to do something, to act, to put an end to sexism and to violence against women. In the early 1970s women realized in a dramatic way the deep roots of the sexist attitudes that work on many levels — political, social and psychic levels — but they also had optimism that women could do something to change the world. Many feminists espoused the Dworkin/ MacKinnon "line" because libertarian attitudes had not done anything to halt degrading representations of women. The women who supported that position were not fools but committed feminists, and we need to remember this if the new debates are to be inclusive as well as expansive.

Younger feminists in colleges have grown up with the Dworkin-MacKinnon orthodoxy, consolidated by feminist writings on the "male gaze" as well as knowledge of international sexual divisions of labor. But a substantial minority of young women scholars now share and increasingly articulate the dilemmas we ourselves have experienced in positioning ourselves between the polarized responses to pornography. At one extreme an uncritical, all-embracing engagement with pornography ignores the violence, misogyny and racism evident within particular forms of pornography. Pornography can be used to signify to women their powerlessness. In some cases men use it to sexually harass and abuse women in situations where the women have no or little control. Pornography does form part of the everyday symbolic violence against women. However, censorship and censorious attitudes deny us the increasing diversities of representation which pornography offers as well as the possibility of more expansive and liberating expressions of female fantasy and desire. Hopefully, new feminist knowledges which deconstruct pornography's power to demean, humiliate and objectify will help destroy the ability of pornography to generate fear and to control women. To re-organize the power/ knowledge relation of pornography's "regime" may begin to take away its capacity to control.

It is not our purpose here to consider the pros and cons of the porn/ anti-porn debates since the late 1970s but rather to explore further the ideas expounded by the "pro-sex/ anticensorship" grouping. However, given that pornography is a central feature of popular culture, it is important to note just how much popular support there has been for the anti-porn campaigns in the USA. Anti-porn positions have also had considerable currency in Britain, particularly those expounded by Campaign Against Pornography (CAP) and the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship (CPC). While these groups are strong, they arguably have enjoyed less popular support in Britain. In the United States the campaigns' bedrock lies in the discursive alliances between the purity campaigns and the New Right Christian Fundamentalist groups, which speak to the need for protection of vulnerable groups. It is a popular kind of protectionism, articulated through the concept of child protection, which speaks to general anxieties women may have about violence and abuse.

However, some feminists who feel drawn to discourses of protection increasingly find themselves unable to reconcile themselves to the fact that "protection" rhetoric also implies the suppression of expressions of female desire. Whereas calls for protection may still have validity when addressing issues surrounding child pornography, concepts such as difference, resistance, opposition and strategy may provide more appropriate terms for addressing issues of women in pornography

and women viewers. Protectionism does not always appeal to those with a voice, a group which has become increasingly used to dealing with situations in which the odds are stacked against them. Pro-sex, anti-censorship campaigners effectively make this point.

The three U.S. women we talked to were well aware of the nuances and subtle differences between the various anti-porn positions. They felt that those arguments had been exhausted — that the particular debates around censorship and legislation faced an impasse. The three teachers' sense of frustration came not just from attacks on their courses and their films and videos but also from their concern about what successful legislation might mean in terms of clamping down on creative activity and curtailing an important vehicle for women's sexual exploration and development. They were also concerned to reach those younger working and middle-class U.S. women who have as many, if not more, prejudices against feminists than against pornography. Constance Penley noted that in her work with women *Star Trek* fans who produce homoerotic pornography based on the *Star Trek* fictional universe that she was struck by how often she heard the fans say, "I'm not a feminist, but..." These fans reject an identification with feminism on class grounds and also because they perceive all feminists to be moralistically anti-pornography, which the fans take to mean anti-sex and anti-men as well. This often-repeated attitude led Penley to feel that the time had come to challenge a culturally popular anti-feminist position.

It is unfortunate, but perhaps no coincidence, that these discussions are taking place in the U.S. during a time when there is a broader questioning of political correctness. The extremity of the anti-porn orthodoxy of the last decade was phrased in its commonly stated stance that pornography not only caused violence against women but is violence against women and that every heterosexual act of sex is an act of rape.

Feminist scholars' and artists' new opposition to this position surfaced partly in response to the threat of impending censorship legislation and the realization that so many of the assertions of causal connections between the consumption of pornography and violence against women remain unproven. Opposition hardened with the attempts to censor the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and other less well-known lesbian and gay artists. In the 90s many lesbians who had been active in the U.S. censorship campaigns against pornography have begun to re-think their positions because of attacks on works exploring lesbian sexuality. We cannot overemphasize the contribution to the widening debate on sexuality by lesbian and gay writers artists and activists who destabilize notions of heterosexuality, and we need to acknowledge the degree to which pornography has been an enabling element in the articulation of "oppositional sexualities."

Any reading of the history of sexuality shows how censorship provides a crucial weapon in the armory of normalization; the most recent illustration of such a rule by force can be seen in current campaigns to enforce the ideology of a monogamous, heterosexual "real family" through legislation and the media and constantly to suggest that other expressions of sexuality are not legitimate. The emphasis on the constructedness of sexuality in much contemporary pornography and the widespread use of sex toys and artificial objects establish an important challenge to essentialist notions of sexuality, particularly women's supposedly

"natural" sexuality. The dedication to expansive and exploratory work around the expression of female sexuality is what differentiates this particular feminist debate on pornography from others and is what makes it so important.

The paradigm shift in analyses of pornography relates to wider theoretical developments, including those in poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, which have challenged once taken-for-granted concepts of identification and have problematized what readers/ viewers actually do. (Do we, in fact, identify in any simple way with any characters in a film?) Theorists of psychoanalysis and the visual offer numerous propositions about the processes of identification. And fictional and narrative considerations further add to the complexities and contradictions involved in explaining pornography. Identification may not reside with the subject(s) of the pornographic artifact but with the different positions of desire offered. Foucault's analyses of the multiplicitous nature of power has led to widespread challenges to the one-dimensional, dominating apparatuses which are able to fill the empty vessels of human bodies with ideology. Feminist theorists of political movements have shown how a concept of resistance is central if one is to understand the many different women's responses to the sexism of the everyday. Black feminists have shown how the appeal to a homogeneous concept of womankind only conceals the power differences between women and men and between black and white women.

The emphasis in feminist audience studies and in the reexamination of the "male gaze" does not correspond to the ideological position of many anti-pornography feminists who see women as victims of male representation and violence. Pornography is a contested ground precisely because of the different contexts and subjectivities which we occupy. Pornography, or visual representation in general, elicits multiple and contradictory readings — all of which interface with the different subject positions of the viewer/ reader. Feminist research on visual representation shows a strong contingent of oppositional viewers. Audience response is extremely context-dependent. One of the few certainties is that audiences rarely behave in accordance with ideological or theoretical expectations.

Although the recent debates on pornography center on representation, our intent is not to detract from the fact that sexual violence frequently forms a part of women's lives but to shift emphasis. Pornography is only one part of far wider regimes of representation, institutionalization and economic organization, which work on an inter-textual, inter-cultural basis, being both reproductive and contradictory. Because of this complexity, the current discussion can engage a variety of feminists who assert that problems and questions around sexual representations are important. One need not personally "like" commercial pornography or even artistic, avant-garde representations of sexuality to understand that analyzing it without condemning it plays an important role in developing feminist knowledge.

The paradigm shift has also occurred because more and more women refuse to see themselves simply as passive victims. Carol Smart has shown how the language used in the anti-pornography campaigns combines with popular discourses of traditional morality, addressing some of the conservative paradigms of respectability which have historically regulated expressions of women's sexuality. The anti-pornography campaigns' assumptions also articulate fixed positions on sexuality; women are always oppressed, men always operate sex as power. Men

have agency and domination; women have passivity and powerlessness. These dichotomies fit neatly into traditional notions of women's place. They reproduce women as victim, vulnerable, with no potential for change. If women display or express sexuality, according to conservative morality, they are eroticizing their own degradation.

As examples of popular culture, pornographic films and video clearly merit serious study but not necessarily indiscriminate celebration of each and every one of them. But if one accepts that there is no direct causal connection between pornographic representations and reality, between images and what people do, then only concepts of personal preference remain and the tricky area of "taste." Pornography nearly always becomes associated with low culture. Only when it can adapt for consumers a knowledge of high culture codes to create distance from the vulgar and banal does it converted into erotica and art film. Pornography's lack of distance from the immediately affective creates problems for critics, who traditionally rely on a body of specialist knowledge to understand the "text" and to demarcate the boundaries of taste. Yet, it is around these very areas that much of the debate needs to take place — dealing with preference, taste, affect, what turns you on as well, and what dominant cultural mores deem respectable and acceptable.

At a conference we attended in the United States, we saw evidence of this new, more open approach to pornography not only in the content of some papers but also in delegates' responses. In the opening plenary of the Console-ing Passions: Feminism, Television and Video conference (USC, April 1993), Constance Penley (UC Santa Barbara) spoke on "Pedagogies of Porn." She outlined her recent experience of teaching a course on pornographic film and video as a popular U.S. genre from a "pro-sex, anti-censorship" point of view, the audience offered no great outcry, not even a critical question. Yet two or three years earlier this would have been an explosive issue for a feminist conference. Adrienne Jenik (UC Irvine), who teaches, makes and programs lesbian pornography, gave a paper, "Does It Really Turn You On? Lesbian Pornography and the Search for Visual Excitement."

Interested in following up on their perspectives, we talked at length to Constance Penley, Adrienne Jenik and Gloria-Jean Masciarotte (Notre Dame), who taught a pornography course several ago whilst at the Rhode Island School of Design, to see how the paradigm shift is being effected in the United States. All three consider the existing debates on pornography and censorship as narrow, sterile and uninformed by knowledge of what pornography actually is and means to people. They lament the fact that in the popular U.S. imagination feminism has become equated with a crude, anti-sex, anti-pornography position. They want to win back some of the discursive ground lost in the last decade and to create a better popular image for feminism by offering broader, more imaginative and expansive discourses about sexuality, particularly women's sexual practices and fantasies. They, and we, hope that the following discussion of pornography and film — both central sites of popular discourse in our culture — might do just that.

BS [Beverley Skeggs]: Many faculty and staff in Women's Studies in the United States have supported the Dworkin/ MacKinnon line, but you had the full support of your Women's Studies Department for your study of popular visual artifacts

which, according to the censorship lobby, not only degrade women but pose threats to their physical safety. Is this unusual?

CP [Constance Penley]: It probably was, but my colleagues knew all about the course and felt it was scholarly. It allowed students to make up their own minds about issues. Women's Studies staff, including the Rape Crisis Counselor, sometimes sat in on the course, and they were extremely supportive when the local Campaign Against Pornography attacked it. I was also fortunate to have the support of my colleague Daniel Linz, who with Edward Donnerstein is one of the leading researchers in the United States into the effects of pornography.

PK [Pat Kirkham]: Could you tell us something about the campaign against you and the course?

CP: A local fire storm erupted over my course. The student newspaper ran a "neutral" piece, quoting my objectives and rationale for the course. Enter Santa Barbara County Citizens Against Pornography (SBCCAP). The group protested to the University in no uncertain terms and expressed astonishment to find that a) it was a woman teaching the course from a "pro-sex" position and b) a feminist. "I just don't understand," said the group's president to my departmental chair, "feminists hate pornography." I was subject to a degree of personal hassle including the SBCCAP trying to get me to deny in the local press that it had tried to get my course closed. The local paper, usually keen to trash the University, responded to the SBCCAP campaign of letter writing to the University and the newspaper with an impassioned editorial in defense of the course. The paper then assigned a reporter to attend my classes and conduct extensive interviews with me about my background, training and how this course fitted into my other work on feminist media theory, film and cultural studies. The SBCCAP hated this because their position is that there is nothing good to study about pornography except its harmful effects.

G-JM [Gloria-Jean Masciarotte]: It is important to remember the institutional context. The course I taught took place two years ago at the Rhode Island School of Design where there were no problems about courses that were liberal or radical in content. I now teach feminist theory at the Catholic University of Notre Dame but have to say that it is difficult to imagine putting on a course there such as I taught at Rhode Island. The former is a very Roman Catholic institution and that affects how one can operate.

DEFINITIONS

PK: Pornography is one of the most popular forms of sexual expression within our culture, yet it remains notoriously difficult to define. Do you try to define it in your courses?

CP: I wanted to avoid definitions. The question "what is porn?" is just not interesting. You can take a basic definition and say "explicit sexual material intended to arouse." Everybody can agree on that. People talk about porn as if it's this thing that everybody knows and recognizes. They talk about it in generalities but it's only interesting when you talk about specifics. By running my course as a Film Studies course rather than a Women's Studies one and by using a "Cultural Studies" approach, I could expand the student's knowledge of what pornography is

and how it figures in people's lives. I wanted to avoid the done-to-death question of whether or not it should exist. That debate is at an impasse. There is very little understanding of pornography as a genre or why it is such a popular form of popular culture yet people generalize all the time when talking about it — and sensationalize issues and images by wrenching them out of context. I also wanted to introduce students to a wide range of feminist opinions on sexuality and sexual representation.

G-JM: I used a variety of articles, especially popular media articles from different historical moments, that identify items as pornographic. This was done to see precisely how it was/is being used and to explore the usefulness of the category. This approach stops judgments being made on the basis of supposedly knowing exactly what it is, of assuming there is a static category or content.

AJ [Adrienne Jenik]: This expansive use of different definitions is useful because the current categories of porn and erotica don't make much sense, despite being used for legislative purposes. Often the differences lie in what is considered "tasteful" or artistic and the difference between erotica and pornography is best considered as a history of taste culture.

G-JM: Porn can also be seen as a history of legislation and child protection is the new specific issue through which porn is legislated in the United States.

CP: Child protection was the ostensible reason for the orchestrated letter campaign against my course. Using a definition based on "people without reason," the SBCCAP tried to construe my students as mindless impressionable children, as a category to be protected. You can imagine what the students thought of that. Becoming the target of the moral protest, which depended on their being construed as in need of protection, was an important learning experience.

AJ: Similar attacks have been made on sex education films and videos for young people. These can have drastic implications, even fatal, if people do not adequately protect themselves against HIV/AIDS.

FEARS

BS: Your talk referred to the fear of pornography. Fear of the unknown is one of the barriers that people who study it may have to overcome, but how do you deal with the possibility that fear may also be part of the excitement of pornography?

CP: There are great fears of the unknown. I had students who came in spite of their fears or because they felt pornography was something they ought to know about. When I walked into the class of seventy students on the first day, what I saw was seventy terrified faces. I didn't know exactly what they thought they were going to see, but "common knowledge" told them it would be gory slasher films with explicit and violent sex.

BS: Presumably they believed, via knowledge of anti-pornography campaigns, that they were going to see women's bodies being damaged, objectified and exploited?

CP: Yes I also think they thought that somehow pornography is different from other films/videos and that they would automatically identify with "abused"

woman. In fact, pornography is far more complex than that. It is able to play around with power possibly more than mainstream films. The students were surprised by the wide range of representations available of women.

AJ: As a programmer watching people view pornography, especially lesbians, I see a great deal of fear, and it is a real barrier. There is also an expectancy of something awful or embarrassing, and there is also the experience of fear and arousal together. It's the most complicated reading of an audience I've ever had. Fears get replaced by other feelings as the movie or video progresses. People get bored, excited, embarrassed, self-conscious and aroused — and all these get mixed up together. It is a very complicated parcel, one that is rarely unpacked in analysis. Confronting these mixed and often contradictory responses can be a way to deconstruct our fears and desires.

CP: The students began with a fear of the unknown, believing that they may be harmed by watching pornography; but by the end of the class they felt pornography just wasn't the bogeyman anymore. I felt it was similar to the climate of fear that children are made to live in. When I was doing research on the Challenger explosion and responses to it, I explored children's fears and looked at how they incorporated these into their everyday fantasies and nightmares. They were terrified that they were going to get kidnapped. Fear campaigns are so socially coercive. In whose interests is it to have children so afraid? In whose interests is it to have us so afraid of pornography?

PK: People express fears but what do they actually fear?

CP: Fear of finding out what their fantasies are. So many of the students have been taught that to have impure thoughts, even to touch their own bodies, is a sin. They have institutionalized guilt.

G-JM: Another fear is that of seeing lots of naked bodies and also dealing with your own in relation to them. These fears differ according to how confident you are about your own body. The other apprehensions are about seeing lots of sex up on a big screen-and again responses to that differ. The students do not necessarily make a link to their own bodies, as with other bodily genres such as horror they are able to divorce fantasy from reality, film from the everyday. It is fascinating to see what happens when the issues related to porn are brought into the classroom, an institution which creates its own semantic responses. As a class, we were doing as a group in public what most people do individually or in couples, in private. Showing porn videos at 7.30 a.m. in a group certainly changes the whole experience of porn.

AP: The fears that surround pornographic consumption are very different for women than for men. It's almost impossible as a woman to go to a porn theatre by yourself. If you do, after a few minutes, angry men will come and basically assault you. When I go into stores to buy porn, there's an invisible fence around me. My presence increases the awareness of guys about why they are there, and I become increasingly aware that I am a woman. I become very aware of my body, I feel uncomfortable and have to leave. My being there challenges what porn is for men, and they have to ask what am I, a woman, getting out of it?

TABOOS: THE NATURAL, THE ARTIFICIAL AND THE AUTHENTIC

PK: If fears relate to the forbidden and/or the unknown, what are the taboos? Are there particular things which seem particularly difficult to accept?

CP: It was during the second part of my course — which dealt with contemporary uses, transformations and appropriations of pornography — that there were lots of gasps, especially from the men and especially at the first cock ring. Also at scenes of anal penetration, to say nothing of two men using an eighteen-inch double dildo. The Gay Men's Health Crisis videos try to break down taboos, they show every possible practice — every organ, every orifice, everything.

G-JM: The student's lack of knowledge about so many things related to sex is a major problem for anyone teaching a course on pornography and film because you can so easily slip into basic sex education. I was not at all prepared for the students' levels of inexperience, or lack of knowledge, of sex, sexual practices and sexuality. Yet it was crucial to talk about that.

CP: The women were generally less "squeamish" about taboo areas than men, though when we studied some videos from Blush Entertainment, some were surprised to see lesbians strapping on dildos. The rock song "Detachable Penis" and this scene brought together the realization that here is an instrument of pleasure that you can just strap on and have fun with.

BS: And as Linda Williams notes, the interesting thing about dildos is not that women put them on but that they can take them off.

G-JM: My students had similar responses, tending to get most uneasy when objects or "artificial things" like dildos or cock rings, appeared and disrupted sex's "naturalness." But this was useful as it helped us deconstruct notions of what sex is or should be.

AJ: It all shows the extent to which our desires are policed, both internally and externally. It is illegal to show fisting in a public place — actually the reference is to penetration with/by an inorganic object which, believe it or not, your finger or hand is legally construed to be.

CP: I used two versions of an Annie Sprinkle video — one the original, the other after a section was cut by order of the FBI — to raise questions of censorship, to ask, "Does the FBI really say we can't do this?"

AJ: Using the old inorganic finger again, I suppose.

PK: Do you deal with the question of whether or not there is such a thing as an authentic sexuality?

CP: Yes. This can be done by discussing Candida Royale's Femme Production videos. Royale produces sexually explicit videos for women and heterosexual couples. We also showed the Fatale videos, produced by Blush Entertainment, the production arm of On Our Backs. SUBURBAN DYKES, THE HUNGRY HEART and CLIT are interesting because they appropriate all the images and icons of mainstream pornography and in no way attempt to find an "authentic" lesbian pornography. I personally like the "let's take over all the mainstream codes and turn them around and use them how we will" attitude.

AJ: But remember that "nature" and erotica often go hand in hand in lesbian porn. There is a strong strand of filmmaking where you get lots of action in woods and tons of natural motifs.

CP: You're right. We did contrast the Fatale videos with some "softer," more romantic, and supposedly more "authentic" pieces

RESPONSES

BS: Did the students feel comfortable watching porn videos in mixed sex groups?

CP: I had no idea what would happen. I expected a lot of discipline problems, but I have never seen such well-behaved students. They were so sensitive and accommodating of each other's ambivalences. I know from their course logs, which they had to keep, that some people felt uncomfortable and embarrassed about feeling aroused. There were some students who wished they could talk about arousal in class.

BS: The classroom brings with it myths of mastery of reason and control, the showing of pornography must make quite a challenge to those myths, how do you deal with arousal?

AJ: People will often talk about every response but sexual arousal. There are so many assumptions about what will arouse people, but the only consistent thing is that responses are not consistent. Amazing differences arise. It's one area that is totally unpredictable. Interesting things happen when I show my own work to students. It can bring to the surface new levels of embarrassment, not only because I made the films but because they are sometimes very personal. It challenges all the code of objectivist, rationalist pedagogic practice. It's hard for students to look at the tapes without thinking, "Hey that's my professor's pussy on the screen."

CP: Students came out with astonishing bits of misinformation. So many men in the class saw blow jobs as an act of sacrifice that women hated. They could not believe it could be a site for sexual fantasy and pleasure. Several men also wrote from the presumption that male sexuality is predominantly murderous to women, a position which I challenged. I told them that I didn't believe it and that there must be possibilities for change. The men also wanted to wallow in what they perceived as guilt. I found that pornographic media is the ultimate test case for all issues of sexuality and the popular. Following a discussion of SUBURBAN DYKES and HUNGRY HEARTS, one of my students noted that we go to pornographic films not to see our fantasies matched by the images on screen but to find out what our fantasies are.

RACE

BS: At a recent meeting in Britain, black feminists protested about the wearing of leather-studded collars because they represented slavery. In fact, colonialism operates as an erotic project through the commodification, and the racist hyper-sexualizing myths of black women's and men's bodies. Can you say more about the race, sexuality, gender axis that intervenes in these debates?

CP: I used as one of my texts the book *Men Confront Pornography*, in which men

talk about their own consumption practices, how it figures in their lives, and how it affects their politics. It's not a great collection of essays but useful. The least forthcoming are the Marxists; the most engaging and poignant are the gay men who say they would not have had a sexuality had it not been for porn. There is only one essay by a black man, and he does not discuss his own consumption practices. He argues that the black community has far too many pressing problems to be bothered with pornography. The problems referred to are undoubtedly serious, but the essay, in the end, is an evasion. The problem is that there is so little written and made. I used the book *How Do I Look?* which includes Richard Fung's essay on Asian gay men, but I had to go into adult video stores to pick out material on inter-racial couples in order to raise certain issues about race, gender and sexuality.

BS: One of the central problems with the traditional view of pornography, as Pratibha Parmar has pointed out, is that it assumes that all women's experiences of pornography will be the same. One only needs to look at the work of Angela Davis to show how the term "rape" was mobilized in very different ways by black and white men. She also demonstrates how black female sexuality is constructed from far more than pornography.

AJ: The hyper-sexualization of black women is a big issue for me as a maker. It's a huge problem in pornography. When I watch mainstream commercial porn, I deal with the images of black women by fast-forwarding past the sections on black women because I know the images will raise problems for me. I made WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A YAM AND A SWEET POTATO (with J. Evans Dunlop) in an attempt to deal with the problematic representation of black women but also to deal with black-white desire and my own feelings about that. There's a black lesbian 'zine called *Black Lace* which attempts through writing, photography etc. to deal with this — but they get a lot of heat from the African American community and from white lesbians.

LANGUAGE

PK: Did you and the various students share a common language with which you could discuss sex and sexuality?

CP: We spent the first week moving between colloquial and medicalized discourse, uncertain of what fit in the academic situation. After a week we all used colloquial language.

G-JM: After we were comfortable with each other, we used the colloquial. If students feel safe in a classroom, the issue of terminology can be openly discussed. In real life nobody ever calls things by their Latin or anatomical names. Some words were common across groups, others very culture, age, gender, race specific.

BS: By teaching the courses have you given women a greater ability to speak about their sexuality? If so, how do they articulate that? Some Black female rappers have been criticized for using what is said to be pornographic language. As the argument goes, that language has been constructed by men for men and therefore does not allow women to express their sexuality.

AJ: The discussion of pornography is one of the few places where such questions can be addressed. Debates about discourses of sexuality take place when one is

making, screening or programming pornography, and these debates become both more specific and more expansive because there are objects and images to be looked at and considered. We need to admit that such detailed discussions of sexuality, of fantasies and desires, do not just pop-up "naturally" amongst women and that feminists talk about sexuality much less readily than is assumed. Pornographic films lead women to think in completely different ways about what they like and what they don't like.

Making pornographic films, or thinking about making one, is a tremendous instrument for change. Porn language, especially in straight lesbian porn (as opposed to sadomasochistic porn), is expanding and expansive at the moment it makes you think about your body and its parts in new ways and through new terms. Terms like hot pink love button, pussages or cunt flick might seem silly or might seem great, but they stir you to think of your own terms. We too often accept given terms and have no place or space to find others.

PK: You've reminded me of the pleasures of discovering the term "button" in *The Color Purple*. There is a strong connection between word and image, between image and fantasy. Button was such a different word from clitoris that it immediately brought forth a host of new images, new practices and new fantasies.

AJ: Like "pushing the pebble" now. What you say about the connection with the visual is so important. In SCREAM BOX we put out a call for a "better, more expansive" vocabulary and received some amazing responses. Cunt and other words are so heavy in sound and feel, as well as so loaded, that we need other terms, then we can see other images.

G-JM: As creative artists and designers, all members of my class were interested in producing images and objects. But it was only the women who felt confident within that context to play with pornographic images and produce pornographic videos, paintings and other art forms. One produced a brilliant porn puppet show.

CP: That point brings us back nicely to the popular. There is some exciting work at present around comic book aesthetics and pornography. Another revelation when studying porn is the amount of humor — from terrible bad punning to more complicated stuff. It is another important part of pornographic film which is often ignored. Linda Williams's research suggests that rather than becoming more violent, contemporary pornography is becoming more knowing, ironic and humorous.

Media scholars teaching pornography Stepping across Broadway

by Ramona Curry

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How can college faculty teach serious critical approaches to a branch of film and video entertainment that many university denizens consider lower than low culture — even downright vile? Quite pragmatically, how can a faculty member secure the support of her or his academic department for a course incorporating sexually explicit material and teach that course without evoking the censorious ire of Christian "family value" proponents and/or of anti-pornography feminists? Most crucially, what pedagogical aims and experiences have media faculty had in addressing film and video pornography as a complex contemporary discourse on the body?

Several presentations at the 1995 meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies (SCS) March 2-5 in New York City addressed these concerns. What emerged as a three-event series (not counting the porno films playing directly across Broadway from the mid-town Manhattan conference hotel) began the first afternoon, when Peter Lehman (University of Arizona) and Lauren Rabinovitz (University of Iowa) chaired a seven-panelist workshop entitled "Pedagogy and Porn." They and the other contributors (John Champagne, Eithne Johnson, Chuck Kleinhans, Donald Staples and Chris Straayer) provided sample syllabi and spoke briefly about their experiences teaching pornographic materials in a variety of course contexts and academic institutions, then engaged in lively discussion with the forty or so educators who packed the room. The following day Constance Penley (University of California at Santa Barbara) and Donna Cunningham (University of Southern California) shared their pedagogical experiences and views about "Sexually-Explicit Materials in the Classroom/ The Classroom in the Public Sphere," the title of their workshop, with an interested audience of about twenty-five. (A third announced panelist, Peter Feng of the University of Iowa, did not participate.)

Then, on the third day, Saturday, conferees could hear former porn star Candida Royalle speak about the challenges she faces in producing, directing and marketing "erotic films for the woman who knows what she wants and the men who love her" (to quote from publicity for her New York-based company, Femme Distribution). Royalle noted that her short films and early features (among them *SENSUAL ESCAPE*, *THREE DAUGHTERS* and *CHRISTINE'S SECRET*) had interested producers of the Home Box Office (HBO) program *REALSEX*, who encouraged her to move from video into 35mm film, their standard. But, she reported, HBO

representatives rejected her first 35mm feature, *REVELATIONS* (1993), a dystopia future story, because, they said, "It makes people think." Royalle's comments introduced a video screening of *REVELATIONS*, which depicts a woman's sexual awakening after she discovers pornographic videos long banned by the puritanical, authoritarian state under which she lives. Royalle seemed anxious to know what the assembled two dozen academics would think of the film's combination of erotics and anti-censorship politics and particularly of its "girl-girl" scene, given that such suggestively "lesbian" simulations are a staple in pornography targeting straight males, which Royalle consciously tries to circumvent. (The consistent absence of the so-called standard "money shot" — a close-up of the ejaculating penis — is one feature that distinguishes Royalle's films from conventional "het" porn.)

Royalle's SCS audience (about 75% male, similar to the sexual distribution at the workshops) demurred when she rather hesitantly offered to return for discussion after the film. (The attendees' decision was perhaps motivated as much by their overloaded conference schedules as by a disinclination to discuss the material). Several viewers did gather in the hall after the screening to discuss the unusual film, which integrates explicit sexual sequences into an Atwoodian vision of the near future in the U.S. (iconographically identified in a closing shot). But, some wondered, does the film really count — or work — as pornography? Would *REVELATIONS* warrant study within a course entitled (to draw on some syllabi distributed in the first workshop), "Pleasure and Danger" (Champagne), "Sexuality in Media Narratives" (Lehman), or "Feminist Film Theory: Pornography" (Rabinovitz)?

While the two scheduled panels overlapped in the issues that arose and even in some of the persons attending, the distinct structure and style of each panel led to differing emphases and discussion outcomes. The gender diversity among the first workshop's panelists, along with geopolitical and economic distinctions among the institutions where they have taught, yielded a range of agendas and experiences. Lauren Rabinovitz, for instance, emphasized the importance of teaching close readings of pornographic texts, from a grounding in genre analysis (following Richard Dyer and Linda Williams) and in feminist film theory. Donald Staples (University of North Texas), who has served as an expert in more than a dozen legal suits about pornography, includes a historical overview of porn in an undergraduate film theory course. As part of that study, Staples and two graduate assistants each accompany small groups of class participants on outings to a porn theater; the students follow up with short in-class presentations. Eithne Johnson (Emerson College) has spoken on women's pornography to classes at many northeastern U.S. institutions. She reported her experiences of preemptive censorship when invited to lecture at places like Harvard, under the initial (unacceptable) stipulation, "Just talk; don't show us anything."

Chuck Kleinhans (Northwestern University) noted that his teaching explicit sexual representations arose out of his experimental film and video classes.^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) He considers the status of pornography an important public policy and presents its relevance as such to students, in part to "provide them superego reasons to explain to others why they're taking the class." Chris Straayer (New York University), who has taught courses on sexual representation at three institutions (the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the University of Arizona, and NYU), is

now integrating sexually explicit materials into other classes. Straayer noted two precepts in her teaching pornography. First, she encourages students to acknowledge their own sexualities and to be present in the class as sexual subjects. Second, she supplements conventional porn images with what she called "deviant voices," including independent gay and lesbian productions, videos depicting sadomasochistic practices, and video works by artists such as Vito Acconci.

Peter Lehman spoke with enthusiasm about the combined upper-level undergraduate and graduate course on explicit sexual representations that he was currently teaching. John Champagne, who taught his first undergraduate course on pornography at Carnegie Mellon in 1988, expressed some reservations, arguing in a short prepared statement,

"While I continue to find the debates around pornography intellectually compelling, I am now less certain that pornography is an appropriate object of study for an undergraduate class. The topic is so culturally 'loaded' that it necessarily brings with it a variety of pedagogical difficulties. For example, our cultural investment in sexuality as the locus of the truth of the individual is extremely difficult to dislodge... Because a course in pornography is always in danger of being merely symptomatic of our cultural understandings of sexuality and gender, it requires a certain critical engagement that is extremely difficult to maintain...I'm not sure that undergraduates are prepared for such a task, given the way it demands that the theorist be implicated in his/her object of study..."

Several panel participants concurred that their graduate and undergraduate students generally treated the materials distinctly. Rabinovitz found that her undergraduate students often intellectualized their reactions, whereas graduate students tended to share a camaraderie and personal openness to the material. Lehman recounted an exception that caught him unaware. Many students in a graduate seminar at the University of Arizona focusing on race were upset by the representations of gay black men in *TONGUES UNTIED* (Marion Riggs, 1989). The account underscored other panelists' observations about the importance of informing students what to expect, not only from the titles on the syllabus, but perhaps also in advance announcements that foster, in Kleinhans' words, an atmosphere of learning, trust and respect.

Several speakers noted gender distinctions in what material their students found most disturbing: Rabinovitz found that women generally expressed anxiety about her porn, while the men expressed anxiety about videos depicting gay male sex. Reports of student reactions at the University of Arizona generally followed that pattern. When Straayer taught a section on AIDS representations, including some gay male video art, in a large media course at Arizona, a group of young men got up and stomped out. A woman in Lehman's class reacted to a film by telling her classmates about having been gang raped. Perhaps accepting the arguments of the "Women Against Pornography" movement, she presumed a very intense causal relation between pornography and what had happened to her. Lehman noted that her comments had a chilling effect and effectively shut down further discussion of the film.

Johnson also remarked the combination of curiosity, nervous laughter, and fear of

seeing real violence, which she frequently encounters among female participants in her classes, and said she almost always needs to dispel "the snuff-film myth." Johnson has found a prevalent assumption that sexual material is contagious, as has Rabinovitz, who remarked that some women "seem scared that images of het porn will do damage to them."

Straayer reported a student performance in an NYU course that evoked issues of gender in relation to nudity and the camera. A male student stood nude with a camera and asked each class member for a five-second on-camera response. Some feminist friends whom Straayer told of the performance, which embodied the male prerogative to control the camera, thought it might constitute sexual harassment, especially to any members of the class who might be victims of rape. Upholding her policy of letting the class as a whole judge a situation, Straayer surveyed students anonymously after the performance, and found they were more concerned that their voices not be censored than that they would be exposed to something they could not handle. Straayer noted that generally, should a vocal complaint arise, silent students are usually supporters. She recommended giving any written protest anonymously to all students and asking in class for everyone's opinion on the matter. Proceeding in this manner defined material in class as a joint matter of all students' concern, she said, rather than as "a discussion between five boys and the university president."

The session scarcely began to address the complexities implicit in the panelists' many observations about gender and class standing. By this I mean not only the evident academic class standing (and its general correlations with age and social status) but also, implicitly, how conditions of economic class may have inflected the students' responses at various institutions. One audience member volunteered that at a school which attracts predominantly working class and lower-middle-class suburban students, he shows such sexually charged experimental films as SCORPIO RISING (Kenneth Anger, 1962-63) and FUSES (Carolee Schneeman, 1964-67) only in courses which have an introductory film course as a prerequisite. Panelists commented that courses incorporating more conventional narrative pornography also ran more smoothly when they were not the students' first film course.

Of the panelists, Champagne most directly addressed students' social class in relation to teaching pornography. He reported that a female student at Carnegie Mellon had arrived for the last class late, under cover of darkness for the film. When the lights came on, others saw that she was nude, but except for a few giggles and gasps, everyone ignored her state as they drew their chairs in a circle and began to discuss the film. Finally Champagne asked his students, "Are you so privileged that it means nothing to you that one of your classmates is naked?" The class then turned to discussing "the privilege involved in studying pornography at an elite undergraduate institution."

The student explained that she was protesting the course's having insufficiently considered "real bodies," an attitude which Champagne understood as powerfully resisting his attempt "to problematize such an account of the body." He argued that the "phony objectivity" of the classroom viewing situation also flattens the study of sexual representation, particularly when courses emphasize close textual readings:

"At the very least, close analysis must be supplanted with a theorized

investigation of the cultural construction of sexuality and gender, as well as an investigation of the historically varying modes of reception and exhibition of pornography."

Rabinovitz argued that "close readings can introduce larger questions" such as the "extent to which one needs to foreground the cinematographic apparatus as always an attempt to excite the body through its appeals to 'watching.'" She finds that Linda Williams' *Hard Core*,^[2] which recurred on most panelists' syllabi, deals well with that issue in Williams' chapter on Muybridge. The panelists agreed that it is important to teach all pornographic films in historical context. Kleinhans noted that just as he would not show *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* without tracing its historical production and reception, he would not teach a film like *FLAMING CREATURES* (Jack Smith, 1963) without situating it within practices of sexual representation in the avant-garde.

The question arose as to how panelists teach specifically gay and lesbian pornography. Straayer first shows het porn and discusses it as such. Her goal is for students to explore their viewing reactions and in discussion to break down the boundedness of such categorization of films and sexualities. Champagne included sexually explicit lesbian and gay films in his course, but he doesn't wish as a teacher "to be in the position of compelling students to produce the truth of their sexuality." Kleinhans requires that students see, on their own, "two het tapes and one gay male tape," and provides a sampling available for check-out, which he finds useful especially for single female international students, for whom publicly seeking and renting any porn video is culturally virtually unthinkable. He has also approved student requests to watch an entire video on fast forward!

A consensus emerged that faculty should emphasize that they are teaching from their expertise as film scholars, to inquire how and to what degree explicit sexual representations may appeal and contribute to perceived sexual self-identities — and decidedly not running a therapy group. But teachers should be prepared for exceptional student affect and know where to refer students who might come to office hours in some sense of personal confusion. Lehman finds that requiring the students to write weekly journals registering their reactions to the readings, screenings, and discussions, helps counter any impersonal, over-intellectualized approach to class material and gives a forum for expressing their concerns. While he thinks "being disturbed can be a mode of learning," he encourages students to leave a screening they find too difficult and to request an alternative assignment. Kleinhans also allows students to leave screenings at any time but requests they return for discussion; throughout the course, he emphasizes that students should let him know if they do not feel "comfortable." Straayer said that students must understand they are responsible for themselves, and reported that on course evaluations her students often expressed appreciation for her treating them as adults. Both Kleinhans and Straayer use numerous clips of longer works, in part, in Straayer's words, because

"the use of excerpts rather than complete works, especially in the hard-core section, can foreground a scholarly stance when students might otherwise feel overwhelmed."^[3]

All panelists stressed the importance of integrating extensive critical readings with screenings; besides Williams, syllabi required at least excerpts from Michel

Foucault's *History of Sexuality* volumes and numerous essays by authors including Richard Dyer, Martha Gever, Dennis Giles, Judith Butler, John Ellis, Annette Kuhn, and Carole Vance, as well as writings and video by several of the panelists. Rabinovitz has seen how well-chosen early readings, prior to screenings, can help students pass from fearful to curious, during the course's necessary "adjustment period."

The choice of initial films seems critical. Several syllabi started with films that foreground voyeurism like *MARNIE* (Hitchcock, 1964) or *VARIETY* (Bette Gordon, 1984). Straayer begins some courses on sexual representations with a study of horror films such as *CAT PEOPLE* (Paul Schrader, 1982).[4] The first hardcore film that Kleinhans usually shows is a medical film showing sex between a wheelchair-bound man and an able-bodied woman.[5] Kleinhans thinks the film successfully introduces students to more explicit depictions of sex (including rimming) than most have ever seen, because it communicates that the couple are giving each other oral and anal pleasure within an established, loving relationship.

The audience queried the panel about administrative and community reactions to their courses. Lehman and Rabinovitz felt they had both received nothing but support from their university departments and administrations. When a Tucson copy shop refused to reproduce an academic article for his course packet that included a picture on an erect penis, Lehman's department supported him in boycotting the shop. Lehman also reported that a "Take Back the Night" group asked to give a slide lecture to his class; he refused, but offered to announce to his students any public lecture the group scheduled.

Straayer commented that, while administrations have always backed her, she thinks concern increases if courses become visible beyond the university. Kleinhans suggested that even in institutions that allow courses on sexual representation, individual administrators may ridicule course proposals or related grant applications and effectively keep people in fear. Staples said that he had experienced no problems with administration, but later acknowledged that he had not listed the workshop's title when applying for travel funding from his state university. Texas law also prohibits students from using his department's equipment to make pornographic films, he observed.

The suggestion arose that one might wisely wait to teach classes on pornography until after achieving tenure. Yet the panelists' own experiences belied that admonition, for the majority had taught pornographic material without encountering any difficulties, prior to receiving tenure or even completing graduate school. Still, given several recent challenges to graduate students who taught pornographic films in non-film classes, a consensus emerged that such a professionally unprotected group might be particularly vulnerable to institutional criticism. And despite the chorus of reassurances about administrative backing, a few panelists cautioned that gay and lesbian faculty, even with tenure, remained particularly at risk. Presumed heterosexual faculty who teach gay and lesbian, as well as straight, sexual representations, without criticism, may be enjoying cultural privilege. Gay and lesbian faculty cannot afford a false sense of security, several speakers warned, for homophobia in Canada as well as the U.S. always makes their teaching sexually explicit materials highly politically charged.

While the second workshop also offered pragmatic advice about teaching sexually

explicit materials, the *de facto* focus on two southern California universities yielded at once a narrower and more detailed picture. Constance Penley spoke at length about her experiences and policies in teaching a course on pornography in 1993 at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Penley recognized that she has an exceptional opportunity to teach film porn thoroughly as a historical genre, since she has managed to discover and gain free access to a large library of pornographic materials ranging from some early stag and arcade films, to animated shorts (including one called SNOW WHITE privately produced by Disney workers) to 1970s features (including DEEP THROAT).[6] Her course also diverged from those described at the prior workshop in generating widespread controversy and in attracting students whose backgrounds may have prepared them for her analysis of pornography as both a legitimate film genre and a lucrative branch of the industry.

What began as an interview about the course, which Penley gave to the campus student newspaper, mushroomed into a pitched community debate involving local "Citizens against Pornography" groups, and it culminated in Penley's being denounced by right wing evangelist Pat Robertson on his television program, THE 700 CLUB. Robertson condemned the course as an example of "godlessness in the public schools" and "a new low in humanist excess."

The university maintained its support for Penley, however, an outcome which Penley traces to the course's addressing pornography as a popular U.S. film genre, and as such, as worthy an object of study as the Western. Consequently, Penley argued, the course couldn't be put to political or religious tests, but challenged only on the basis of its scholarly terrain. Teaching porn film as a popular U.S. genre makes the film scholar the authority over what is taught. That the film genre exists and is popular (which no one could deny) provides sufficient justification for teaching it as a film historical phenomenon.

As the controversy grew, she and colleagues focused, successfully, on casting the issue as an attempt to undermine academic freedom and to exercise preemptive censorship. Penley, who has a half-time appointment in UC Santa Barbara's Women's Studies Program, did take the precaution of teaching the course under the film studies' rubric, rather than as her women's studies course that term. And she admits to having "cooked the list" of the approximately 65 undergraduate students who took the course, giving those she knew from other film courses priority among the many who wished to enroll. Penley also noted that, in part given her university's geographic location, her students may have exceptional interest in the history and economics of pornographic film, for many of them come from Northridge and North Hollywood, the center of the porn industry.

"About three-quarters of the way through the course, some came to me offering to get guest lecturers — family members and neighbors of their friends who made or acted in porn films."

Penley asserted that an announcement at the outset making clear that the course would show many hardcore images, along with a listing of film titles like SPERMINATOR, should give students sufficient notice about the material covered; she observed no need to excuse those who chose to enroll. Donna Cunningham, who taught sexually explicit material in a small interdisciplinary freshman seminar at the University of Southern California, agreed with Penley's policy, noting that her students appreciated being treated like adults. Cunningham added that while

she recognized that a course including pornography was not entirely "just a course," she avoided treating the scheduled sexually explicit materials as a potential trauma. Peter Lehman countered from the audience that as a male teacher he needed to attend carefully to students' potential discomfort, in part to avoid any perception of sexual harassment from arising.

Penley recounted that when her colleagues and women studies' students first heard of her proposed course, many expected it would demonstrate correlations between pornography and violence. Their prevalent view was that any academic, "scientifically researched" course on porn must show its harmful effects, which Penley does not accept. She found an important effect of teaching a large body of hardcore films the opportunity to expose as unfounded the assumption that pornography involves "a vast practice of violent subjugation and degradation of women." Penley instead sees most porn, like television, as answerable to women's interests:

"In the porn industry, every year is the Year of the Woman. Every film opens with a woman; women's names sell on the boxes; a high percentage of the people behind the scenes are women."

While no one in the audience directly contested those claims, listeners questioned the panelists closely and shared their own experiences. A man and woman from the University of Michigan explained that as dwellers in the "Land of MacKinnon," they would find it impossible currently to teach pornography even as a section of a genre course. A woman who teaches filmmaking at the University of Montreal spoke of the difficult balance she had to maintain between supporting student's personal creative explorations and upholding the university's legally-binding policy against students' producing anything arguably pornographic. Southern California again emerged as offering a different set of circumstances, when Richard Jewell noted during discussion of antipornography movements and censorship that the Playboy Foundation funds an annual USC course on censorship.[7]

Like participants in the first workshop, Penley and Cunningham emphasized the importance of assigning extensive and diverse course readings. Cunningham's freshman seminar at USC, entitled "Sexual Anxiety at the Fin de Siecle," was a writing-intensive course. Penley required 50-60 pages of writing in a 10-week course, including a chapter-by-chapter synopsis of two books (Williams' *Hardcore* and *Dirty Looks*)[8] and of every article assigned, two 8-10 page papers, and writers' notebooks. Penley has since taught the course a second time, when, instead of provoking renewed scandal, it was treated as "old hat." Still, Penley cautioned, generally she'd advise, "Don't do it [teach a course on pornography] without tenure!"

During the first SCS workshop, Eithne Johnson remarked that in her experience, students and fellow faculty tended toward one of two opinions: either "all of mass culture is pornographic" or "porn's a specific genre." The workshops both generally communicated the latter view, and emphasized strategies for successfully teaching porn as such. But that model did not go unchallenged. John Champagne concluded his prepared remarks with the observation,

"My fear is that the study and teaching of pornography will not in any way disrupt business as usual for the discipline of Film Studies. Instead

of calling into crisis the way the discipline constructs its object of study, for example, pornography might become just another set of texts to be included in the curriculum..."

"[While] the debates around pornography are undoubtedly one of the most exciting and intellectually engaging areas of recent film and video scholarship...as teachers...we must find a way to use pornography as a tool to intervene in social constructions of sexuality and gender, without at the same time either merely celebrating or denying our own powerful erotic investments in such constructions."[9]

As a participant/ observer at all three events, and as someone who occasionally teaches sexually explicit materials in a range of courses, I found both workshops instructive, if somewhat uncritical of our own premises about pornography. For example, most of the distributed syllabi addressed implications of racial difference in pornography, if primarily through the range of titles listed. But except for short mention in the first workshop of TONGUES UNTIED and reference to a porn tape UP MY BUN-ZAI, which features ethnically Asian actors, the overwhelmingly white participants in both workshops discussed pornography — whether as a genre or a complex spectatorial mode — as if race were no issue in its teaching or cultural circulation. However, just as anyone planning to show pornography must consider how gender and probably social class inflects the production and reception of sexually explicit images, so must s/he take into account the range of cultural meanings embedded in the unavoidable portrayal of racial/ ethnic similarity and difference.

Another gap I observed in the conference's treatment of pornography was an apparent mismatch between personal theory and praxis. Imagine that SCS had offered two workshops on teaching the Western — and that, simultaneously, a triple-bill of Western films few had seen was running in the cinema across the street. Probably, many people interested in the workshops would make time to see the films, and perhaps refer to one or another in the discussion. In my experience, this was not the case for the porn triple-bill playing across Broadway from the conference hotel. Several times in my hearing at the conference, speakers did mention the porn program, especially the catchiest of the three titles, ANAL SEX ALIEN. But no one at the workshops on pornography seemed to find the almost immediate physical juxtaposition of polite academic exchange and low status popular cultural practice a striking paradox or, to my knowledge, even a phenomenon worth investigating. Still, SCS allowed the first panels considering television scarcely more than a decade ago, and presented the first panel on gender and film only two decades ago, in 1975. The mere scheduling, in 1995, of three participatory events addressing pornography and pedagogy at SCS may, for better or worse, signal a big step across Broadway.

NOTES

1. Straayer and other speakers made reference to her essay "Sexual Representation in Film and Video," in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Criticism*, eds. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice Welch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 503-12, which gives a detailed course overview and extensive bibliographic suggestions.

2. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

3. Straayer, 504.

4. See Straayer, 504-5.

5. Laird Sutton, dir., TOUCHING.

6. Institute for the Advanced Study of Sexuality, San Francisco.

7. The Playboy Foundation has provided \$150,000 to cover the cost of instructors and materials for the course, which reportedly runs without any interference from the funding source. In principle, Jewell asserted, the course could criticize *Playboy's* practices or philosophy. Jewell said that USC's film department also offers a second sponsored course: the Cecil B. DeMille estate provides funds earmarked for teaching and research on that film director.

8. *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography and Power*, eds. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993).

9. I cite here the written statement Champagne had prepared for the workshop, entitled, "The Perils of Porn." To cut his opening contribution back to the required 5-minute time limit, he did not read the last section of his three-page paper, but he kindly gave me the entire statement.

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Teaching sexual images: some pragmatics

by Chuck Kleinhans

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I've been teaching films and videos with sexual content at Northwestern University's Radio/ Television/ Film Department for about twenty years. I started with taboo-breaking films in an experimental film course, but later I developed a graduate level course on sexual representation. This elective class enrolls about fifteen grad students, mostly from RTF but also some from Performance Studies, Theatre, and sometimes Sociology, and it usually enrolls a few seniors as well. Most of the students have seen at least a little moving image hardcore pornography, although some-often female foreign students-have not. It covers basic issues in representing sexuality and gender with examples from advertising, commercial film and broadcasting, phone sex, popular music including music videos, the avant-garde, AIDS education, commercial pornography, and material developed within and circulated to stigmatized sexual subcultures.

It's important to study pornography in the context of the whole spectrum of sexual representation in our culture, so it can be seen as part of a continuum rather than a special ghettoized form. The topics covered include theoretical and historical analyses of sexuality and the body, recent efforts at censorship and control, the "sex wars" debate within feminism, sex education (especially AIDS media), racial images, and pornography as a genre.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] Since most of the students who take the course are RTF majors, students can complete the course with a written paper or creative work. Some of the films/tapes done for the course have gone on to get festival attention and/or been part of MFA portfolios.

The most important thing in teaching that involves highly charged issues such as pornography is to create a classroom atmosphere that promotes mutual learning. I value class discussions in which students can approach differences they may have with trust, tolerance, and respect for each other. I want students to respect diversity. For example, I want to present both sides of the feminist debate on pornography so students can make up their own minds about it. At the same time, I acknowledge at the start that I've written on the subject and taken a clear position opposed to the feminist anti-porn argument. So I can't pretend I'm neutral, but in the classroom I can try to create space for discussion that allows frank expression of differences on all sides.[2]

One basic rule for the class is that no visitors are allowed. As the course goes on and they've talked about what they've experienced with others, students often want to bring roommates, friends, and lovers to class to see certain films/ videos. However, the presence of a new person changes the group dynamics and inhibits the trust that has been built up in the group. I also advise students at the start that I think they should exercise discretion in attributing personal facts or opinions to a specific classmate when conveying information from our discussions outside the class. I explain that people may say things in the process of discussion that they don't want broadcast around campus and that in discussing issues outside of class with others, it's seldom necessary to identify the speaker. However, I do encourage students to talk about the class with others outside of the class: it helps them get more information, more points of view.

One effective early assignment for the course is to write a report after investigating where one can find sexual images and other material on and off campus and what kind it is. This gives them a freedom to explore which can be helpful for learning; since the reports are shared, it also provides a reference point for later discussion. For example, there isn't any child pornography readily available, despite claims by some anti-porn forces that it is a widespread menace.

I always start the course by providing useful superego justifications for the course. (Telling young people in a still-Puritan culture that they can and should think about sex all the time in order to do well in class accelerates learning.) Having a socially acceptable reason for studying sexual images probably helps some students in processing some material. And it helps them explain the course to others, since to say you're taking (or teaching) a course that shows pornography often brings out (defensive) comic, sniggering, or negative reactions from others. I explain that presenting sexual images is a basic professional issue in media making, and that in working situations professionals often have to make decisions about what to show, how much to show, or whom to address in dealing with sex. I also explain that sexual imagery is a public policy issue in terms of internal and external regulation. And I add that social-political movements have raised controversy around these matters. In addition, the tradition of taboo breaking in the avant-garde is historically important in defining and understanding such work.

I always explain in advance the kind of work that will be screened. I give a short description on the syllabus; I end most classes making a connection to what will be seen in the next class to remind students of what's coming up; and I often make some prefatory remarks to introduce a film or tape. When I first started teaching the course, I didn't do this, thinking that it was important for all the students to see all the different material I was screening.

Gradually I came to understand that through the readings the students do have an introduction to everything in the course, and actually viewing an example of every type and every behavior is not as important. People often need time to digest the new information they're getting in the course, especially about the range of human sexual activities. I respect the student's right to self-selection and volunteering out. Every course self-selects to some extent. The U.S. university's cafeteria style of course selection provides lots of choices. I'm always somewhat surprised that some students whom I think would register for the course choose not to do so, and others I've considered unlikely to take the class end up registering.

I always announce in the first few classes that it is OK for any student to leave during anything I'm screening. (This also makes it easier for people to sit where they can leave easily if they think they might.) But I ask them to stay in the hall and come back in for the discussion. I also say that I don't think anyone in the class should draw any conclusions from such a classmate's choice. I explain that I've found that during such a course, people sometimes discover things about themselves or remember things about their own history that are triggered by some of the sounds and images screened.

Image material can cause visceral reactions; pornography is a "body genre" — one that is supposed to evoke a direct physical response. I often explain that I usually cry during the sad scenes in melodramas, and that the most disturbing image materials I ever saw were documentary films used at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, which showed concentration camp atrocities. Once when teaching a documentary film with a birth scene, I had a student literally fall out of his chair, and in an experimental film class another student passed out during a birth film. Films do have the power to upset our emotions and provoke our bodies. When a student or students choose to exit, it serves an important educative function to remind everyone of the power of the images they're viewing and of differences within the group.

Faculty often don't notice when, subtly, they use their own experiences and preferences to manipulate students into accepting cultural objects or practices. In fact, this often broadens the student's outlook and secularizes their understanding of the world. Hearing a professor talk casually about going to the opera, a jazz club, or a poetry reading is an eye opening experience for students whose families or home towns never provided them with such horizons, and the professor's casual reference helps them think they might try it.

I know some people might see letting students choose to leave as making too much of it, acting too protective, not treating students as adults. But my experience is that students often have a tendency to act more sophisticated than they are, especially in a peer group, which is for most of them also an actual or potential dating pool. Group pressure to be hip can also coerce students to be silent, especially those who are uneasy about the practice or ethics of something screened. For me, that's precisely when a discussion should take place. I sometimes have to play devil's advocate to ensure that a fuller discussion is brought out.

Part way through the course, I sometimes solicit anonymous written responses from students on questions they have or topics they would like to have discussed. Related to this is my concern not to dismiss any questions or not listen to any reservations that students may have. Gay male sex is often a starting point for this. Rapidly discussion can become tense when one student makes uninformed statements or uses stereotyped assumptions while other students are openly part of that sexual subculture. In the class, we are, after all, dealing with stigmatized sexual activities. At the same time, talking about safe sex practices, and explicitly noting when unsafe sex is depicted is a good starting point for some discussions. My course readings include safe sex guidelines and I have a detailed set of such guidelines on my office door.

I tend to use clips from films, especially when dealing with commercial pornography, because I think they usually offer the core material for the discussion

at hand. Given the episodic construction of most porn features, and the other characteristics of the genre, narrative and character development are seldom important and often nonexistent. Also, using clips allows for a greater variety in terms of presenting examples from different periods, subcultures, etc. However, I do ask the students to view on their own two heterosexual hardcore features (preferably one shot on film, one shot on video since I lecture on the change from film to video production/ aesthetics/ distribution) and one gay male film of their choice from a video rental stores. I feel that they can then screen the tapes with whatever degree of privacy they need to be comfortable. Basically I want them to get a sense of what goes on in such a film, and given that they are all film students, they can pick up on how the piece is shot and edited, the style of acting, the conventions, etc. very quickly. It's clear that some students (male and female, straight and gay) are fascinated with the porn genre, and others take the assignment as a distasteful or boring necessity. I've had some students simply view the films on fast forward, which denaturalized the viewing enough for them to not be swept up by the raw content.

Although I expect most students to rent their own hardcore tapes, I also provide some on a personal hand-out basis.[3] Part of this is very pragmatic: suburban Evanston where Northwestern is located has video stores which carry heterosexual but not gay porn, so I have some gay porn tapes available so there can be no excuses about availability. Also, it is often more and more difficult to find the titles mentioned in the readings for the course. For example, Linda Williams's book *Hardcore* provides detailed discussion of many shot-on-film titles from the 1970s which are seldom carried in current rental, and few stores carry the Femme or Blush titles. An additional consideration is that for some students, particularly unmarried women from very conservative cultures abroad, it is unthinkable to go and rent hardcore pornography, whereas an appropriate authority figure (the prof) can make the assignment and hand out a tape.

Because *Hardcore* is such an excellent analysis, I've heard of professors who taught it in a film course not specifically on pornography or in a women's studies class, but who were themselves too uneasy with pornography to actually show some and lead a discussion of it in relation to the book. That strikes me as somewhat intellectually irresponsible: as if reading about image material was sufficient to understand it, without actually seeing any images. However, I understand the problem of just parachuting pornography into the middle of a course without context and preparation. In my sexual representation course we are halfway through a ten-week quarter before we get to commercial hardcore pornography and reading Williams' book.

The actual screening of material in class often involves providing additional superego justifications. One of these is medical. The first explicit genital sexual film I show is usually Laird Sutton's TOUCHING.[4] I explain this is an educational film for health care and social work professionals which shows lovemaking by an able woman and a man with a lower spinal cord injury which limits his mobility and genital sensation. I further explain that education for the helping professions has to familiarize people with activities their clients may be involved with. The filmmaker was one of the first to make films for this specific market (Previously medical school education about sex often included illustration by showing stag films; you can imagine what kind of misinformation they conveyed, particularly

about women's sexuality).

The film is partially distanced because the couple look like hippies, and the room they use is filled with paisley pillows and other decorations from the 60s counterculture. It is clear that the couple knows each other's bodies very well and what pleasures the other. There is much oral sex, including the woman stimulating the man's rectum. Students typically find this piece so "romantic," and "natural" that I have to point out that they've just witnessed rimming, which I presume most have not participated in, and the film hasn't elicited the negative reactions that often are linked to gay male anal sex. So this piece also sets up a later presentation of gay male sex as not so different after all.

Another superego justification is the course's presenting experimental films with sexual content as examples of art. Since some of these works have been validated by critics, scholars, museums, and so forth as art, students tend to approach them differently than they do commercial pornography, at least initially. (Questioning the high art/low art dichotomy — erotica vs. pornography — is part of my goal in the course.) Another superego justification for students is explaining certain images and activities as examples of minority subcultural expression. Most recently I've done this with a section on leather culture, which segues into presentations on sadomasochism (SM). It's also important, however, to make students sensitive to differences within identify groups. Given the prevailing silence about sexuality and the stigmatization of large parts of it, students need to be aware that not all representations, even when they emerge from a subculture, are accurate about all members of a group. Thus the "girl/ girl" scenes in mainstream bet porn can be easily shown as essentially male fantasy material.[5] But it's also necessary to point out that the "back to nature" romanticism of lesbian feminist filmmaker Barbara Hammer's DYKETACTICS or WOMEN I LOVE is not something that all lesbians easily or positively relate to. Nor is the "strap on a dildo" mode of some of the Blush lesbian-made porn.

Over the years the things that I've screened that have made students uncomfortable (at least to the point of wanting to talk about it) have been images in STIGMATA, a tape on piercing, tattooing, and cuts, particularly close-up shots of how the genital and nipple piercings are done. And a scene from CANDYSTRIPERS of a fist and most of an arm inserted in a woman's vagina. The biggest controversy I ever had was after screening an AIDS education tape about negotiating safe sex. One section showed a het couple passionately making out, but when they realized they didn't have condoms, the guy just left. The implication that penis/ vagina penetration was necessary to complete intercourse and thereby have pleasurable sex was fiercely challenged by some students who argued for a wide and safe variety of other ways of achieving orgasm for both partners. This incident also emphasized how slowly the social codes around sexual activity change.

To some extent in teaching I benefit from the privilege that accrues to a tenured, married, heterosexual, middle aged white male. The last time I taught the course I had the opportunity to have some graduate students who were working on their dissertations present some of their research in the class. Ilene Goldman discussed Helmut Newton's photography of women based on interviews she had done with him. Audrey Colby discussed her participant-observation study of a women's "Sluts and Goddesses" workshop run by pornographer and performance artist Annie

Sprinkle, Anna McCarthy presented her article on phone sex, and Terri Kapsalis elaborated her article on gynecological images. Also, my RTF department colleague, Laura Kipnis, discussed her videotape on the capitalist commodification of sexuality, ECSTASY UNLIMITED (which was screened), and her essays on *Hustler* magazine, she/male images and fat pornography.[7]

My course has changed over time. In the early 80s it seemed important to spend a lot of time on the debates within feminism on pornography. At the end of the decade, the question of censorship, especially around the Mapplethorpe controversy seemed more important. In the early 90s, feminist-produced pornography was a hot topic. Currently, I want to cover the debate about sex on the Internet.

I've never been satisfied with how I've taught issues of race and sex in this course. In pornography the obvious topics are clear: showing racist stereotypes such as the rape sequence in *BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR*; presenting yet another example of sex tourism in the current crop of "gonzo documentaries" (such as the *BUTTMAN IN BRAZIL* series); demonstrating erasure, such as the non-appearance of Asian men in het porn.

However, I've yet to find very plausible discussions of sexual desire that crosses race boundaries in terms of both representation and identification.[8] For example, if we say the obvious, that black and asian women are exotic Others for the straight white male gaze, we still haven't accounted for such identification in watching a black male actor engaged with a black or white woman. Or straight black male viewing or women's spectatorship of the same scene. The race and gender issues of such pornographic spectatorship are at once the most obvious and the most studiously avoided questions in recent film theory's engagement with "subject positioning" and spectatorship.

The emphasis on topics changes, but the fundamental need to develop an adequate analysis of the power of sexual images remains an important reason for offering the class.

NOTES

1. For a detailed description of a somewhat similar course, see Chris Straayer, "Sexual Representation in Film and Video," *Multiple Voices in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice Welsh (Minneapolis: U of Minn. Press, 1994), 503-512.

2. Actually a consistent criticism I've received in student course evaluations is that I give too much attention to the feminist anti-porn position, given that many students find the Dworkin-MacKinnon writings long on rhetoric, short on thought, and too repetitive.

3. I provide students with some suggestions for titles. For example, *DEBBIE DOES DALLAS* or *DEBBIE DUZ DISHES* (aka *BLAZING MATTRESSES* no. 1) are comedies which new viewers may find more acceptable than the abduction/ rape story at the heart of *BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR*, which also contains a particularly racist stereotype of an African American man who rapes the white heroine. (I do sometimes show a clip from this scene to demonstrate extreme

racism in some examples of the genre.) Similarly with gay porn: outsiders usually find romantic films such as *BOYS IN THE SAND*, which features hunky couples, easier to take than the anonymous orgy sleaze of *L.A. TOOL AND DIE*. (A clip from the latter is good for explicating sleaze as an important erotic/ aesthetic category in considering porn.)

A good mail order source for a somewhat select range of tapes is the feminist sex toy store Good Vibrations (catalogue \$4.00), 1210 Valencia, San Francisco CA 94110.

4. 1972, 17 mm. film. Multi-Media Resource Center, San Francisco.

5. Which doesn't mean that they are not a turn on for some heterosexual women and some lesbians.

6. Anna McCarthy, "Reach Out and Touch Someone: Technology and Sexuality in Broadcast Ads for Phone Sex," *Velvet Light Trap* no. 32, Fall 1993; Terri Kapsalis, "Public 'Privates' and the Gynecological Image," *Public* no. 8, 1993, pp. 184-203.

7. Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*," in Kipnis, *Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender, and Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: U of Minn. Press, 1993), 219-241. "She-Male Fantasies and the Aesthetics of Pornography," in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 124-143. "Life in the Fat Lane," in Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove, 1996), pp 93-121. The video *ECSTASY UNLIMITED* (60 mm.) is distributed by the Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

8. As usual, the most interesting pertinent discussions have come from queer and feminist theorists, such as: Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Male Porn," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Christopher Ortiz, "Hot and Spicy: Representation of Chicano/Latino Men in Gay Pornography," *Jump Cut* no. 39 (June 1994) 83-90; B. Ruby Rich, "When Difference Is (More Than) Skin Deep," in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (NY: Routledge, 1993); Jane Gaines, "Competing Glances: Who Is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*?" *New Formations* no. 16 (Spring 1992): 24-39; and Gaines, "Feminist Heterosexuality and Its Politically Incorrect Pleasures," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Winter 1995), 382-410.

Teaching the body course

by Kate Kane

from *Jump Cut*, no. 40, March 1996, pp. 123-126

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I teach a course called Representations of the Body in an interdisciplinary Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at DePaul University in Chicago. As my colleagues and I have designed it, the course is a broad introduction to the growing corpus of literature on the body as a cultural construct. Materials are drawn from a variety of disciplines (history, literature, anthropology, critical theory, media studies), and proceed from a cultural studies perspective. DePaul is a progressive Catholic institution with a commitment to multicultural education. The MALS degree serves adult evening students who come from an assortment of backgrounds in the city and the suburbs. Curriculum interrogates a range of concepts such as the body, the self, the city. I teach Representations of the Body in rotation with the two colleagues with whom I developed the course.

One of my favorite things about this course is that it allows me to experiment with teaching methods. I frame the course as experimental, and I hope to draw students in to an exploration of their relationships to their own bodies in dialogue with course material. I suggest that we recognize that as students we are bodies as well as brains, something that the academy likes to forget/repress for the most part (physical education is now optional rather than required as it once was, except perhaps for areas that involve performance like speech, theater, and music).

A colleague who specializes in teaching adult students points out that students' brains are contextualized in their bodies.^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) The consequences of such a recognition are many. She believes that twenty minutes is the maximum time a body can sit in the same position and still pay attention (blood circulation slows down). She recommends that instructors take this into account in our lesson plans, especially for classes that last several hours. Further, she says the brain needs glucose in order to function properly — hungry students retain less — and that the traditional taboo on food in the classroom is counterproductive. From these insights I have developed some classroom practices designed to support the teaching goals and to show students how to interrogate their own pedagogical position by breaking the frame of what's expected in a classroom. This perspective will come in handy when we read Foucault, and talk about how institutions rule through the body.

As does feminist scholarship, body studies reconcile the body with the mind, and contextualize the personal within the political and vice versa. Each class I begin by

turning out the lights and leading the class in a guided meditation that invites them to get into their bodies, to leave their daily concerns at the door, and to feel refreshed and ready to concentrate on the class (this is important because otherwise it will make them feel sleepy!). Every twenty or thirty minutes, I plan some activity that requires students to get out of their seats. Sometimes it is simply a break to stand up and stretch. Sometimes it is more elaborate, such as the first night of class. After the introductory and logistical matters have been addressed, I rouse them from their seats to sing a children's party song "The Hokey-Pokey." This song centers on body parts ("You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, put your right foot and you shake it all about"), which anticipates the next section of the class in which we brainstorm a list of metaphorical meanings associated with body parts ("hard-hearted," "head of the class," etc.). (The efficacy of physical activity in the classroom is not a new discovery, I realize — I recall the Russian classes I took in high school — I can't decline a noun to save my soul, but I can still sing every verse of "Moscow Nights.")

Silly as it is, this exercise leaves students refreshed, breaks the ice, and makes us laugh together. This is important because it is part of a second campaign I wage throughout the term: classroom safety. The process of connecting the body with the mind in classroom work is not unproblematic. In addition to the discomfort that may accompany the very fact of its unorthodoxy, topics frequently violate the boundaries of polite discourse. Our second text is *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*,^[2] which is guaranteed to turn at least one male student green about the gills.

My choice of *Blood Magic* for this course derives from my own research on feminine hygiene discourse. Menstruation is an excellent topic for purposes of prying out the historical and cultural specifics of body beliefs. Although it is a virtually universal biological occurrence, menstruation is experienced and interpreted in widely varied ways. Far from being a widespread cultural "taboo," menstrual blood can signify many things: from nothing at all (in more egalitarian societies) to spiritual danger (in heavily religious patriarchal cultures). This unit makes clear that how humans experience their bodies is tied, in complex ways, to local systems of meaning.

I am upfront with students about the agenda of this unit, and invite them to pay attention to their discomfort in whatever form it takes (shock, revulsion, squeamishness, amusement). I suggest that our visceral responses can be guides into an interrogation of the way we personally enter into ideology ("Why do we think it is 'gross' to talk about menstrual blood?"). I forewarn students that I expect that at some point in the course they will encounter something that pushes beyond their own personal boundaries of tolerance (the syllabus suggests that "this is not a course for the faint of heart," which students tell me only encourages them to enroll!). Because what are teaching and learning but our attempts to broaden our horizons? This course foregrounds that process.

As to the matter of personal safety, I follow Chuck Kleinhans' practice of 1) telling students that it is okay to respond viscerally, 2) explaining ahead of time what types of images will be shown, and 3) assuring them that if they find images upsetting they should feel free to leave the room, and that they will not be stigmatized for their sensitivities. (I recall an incident when I was a student of

Chuck's and had to take advantage of this outlet during a showing of BLOOD OF THE BEASTS (a French documentary that shows butchered animals)[3]; my departure was accompanied by that of another student who was pregnant. Chuck came and got us when the film was over. This policy makes such a fine contribution to classroom atmosphere that I follow it in all of my courses.)

The very notion of "grossness" is in fact the next unit, in which we read Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*. [4] Dirt, she says famously, is matter out of place, and serves an organizing function in systems of meaning. Things that gross us out are important clues to our own position in culture. In this unit, I contrast salient excerpts from two John Waters films to illustrate the symbolic value of "dirt": PINK FLAMINGOES, [5] which violates so many taboos — including some that most of us have never thought of — and HAIRSPRAY, [6] where Waters' concern with boundary breaking is transferred from the sexual to the social and political. The highlight, gross-out wise, of this unit is the scene in PINK FLAMINGOES where Divine eats dog shit, and provides the impetus for a discussion of how we can follow our visceral responses into the realm of the theoretical. (Students usually exclaim in disgust, and then ask me to rewind and review the scene several times to see if it is "real.")

I encourage students to monitor their own comfort levels, and to take them into account when they choose a research topic or a field trip site. In order to get their bodies out of the classroom, I schedule an evening for a field trip. They can choose from a number of options that offer varying amounts of challenges: a striptease show, a visit to a morgue, a health club, sometimes a current film (Madonna's BODY OF EVIDENCE, [7] for example). The assignment includes an essay that analyzes the field trip experience in light of theoretical material.

After we have done John Waters, Foucault's analysis of "the implantation of perversions" and the notion of polymorphous desire seems tame. The "Introduction" to the *History of Sexuality* [8] provides a respite from the physical, and engages us in an historical and theoretical perspective from which we can analyze the workings of institutional power on individual bodies.

Course units are designed to build to increasing levels of complexity. We next read bell hooks' *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. [9] In this unit I will be particularly concerned that the black students not feel pressured to represent some monolithic "African American perspective." In some ways it is harder for students to talk about race than it is about sex, and the composition of the class has a great deal to do with how the book gets discussed. Ayoka Chenzira's HAIRPIECE [10] resonates with black women. Marion Riggs' TONGUES UNTIED [11], an experimental documentary about being black and gay, makes a good dialogue with hooks' discussion of black masculinity.

As I first envisioned it, the historical and critical material in the course so far is in part preparation for the class to deal with pornography. I have laid the careful groundwork for a safe classroom, established a rigorous intellectual atmosphere, and notified students that we will be seeing actual graphic sexual imagery. Imagine my chagrin when I find that these students are blasé about pornography, that they have talked about it in several other classes. They have not, however, considered it as a film genre, as does our reading, Linda Williams' *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*. [12] Students have also not seen in the classroom the

kinds of explicit pornographic films that I include to illustrate Williams' argument. I follow her historical chronology: a stag film can be shown in its ten-minute entirety; I use excerpts from some of the feature-length films she discusses, as well as from couples video and women-made video (such as the *Femme* series) available in local video outlets.

To facilitate discussion, this unit includes a reading from *Women Who Run With the Wolves*,^[13] the chapter on the obscene goddess and women's sexual humor. This article establishes laughter as a permissible response to sexual imagery, which helps dissipate some of the tension and reticence. Laughter is an important physical release and lets us contextualize pornography among other genres designed to elicit involuntary physical response: melodramatic tearjerkers, low comedies, and thrillers.^[14] A brief sojourn in sexual humor then, sets up a segue into Williams and absolves students of any guilt about how their bodies may respond to the sexual imagery we will see. There is a limit to how much safety I can guarantee, as I discuss later. Finally, we want here to include pleasure in our category of visceral reactions that are culturally determined. I believe the humorous parameters permit the class to experience both pleasure and discomfort safely.

I encounter my own limits of tolerance in our last unit on piercing and tattoo. Students seem to enjoy seeing my discomfort as we watch a documentary on the subject, *STIGMATA*,^[15] that shows actual genital piercings. I have to say that teaching this course has been responsible in part for my decision to have a tattoo myself, something I plan to share with the class the next time I teach it. As the tattoo artist was scoring colors into my flesh (it hurt like a son of a bitch), I distracted myself with thoughts of what my tattooed students had told me (about a fourth of the class had tattoos), and of our readings^[16] about transcending the physical through pain. Later, I had to come to grips with my feelings about being one of those people now, the marked ones, and the experience of becoming something that used to be Other.

In conclusion, I would like to make some observations about cross-cultural understanding and teaching the body. Students want to know how they can put themselves inside another culture when all they know is western rationalism. (This comes up when we read Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,^[17] a novel about female circumcision in Africa.) They get into mental cul-de-sacs where they cannot reconcile their longing to know the Other with their consciousness of being limited by their own experience ("how can we make judgments about other cultures?"). As some feminist arguments put it, how can women speak our own truths when the only language we know is phallogentric? How can we transcend being centered where we are? Although this is an important question, I believe it is not impossible to see/ think outside one's own culture, and this body course gives me the opportunity to teach students one way to get there — through their awareness of the bodily responses they have to course material.

When they have a sensation, I ask them to stop whatever they are doing and notice it and what caused it. Here is the chance to "catch" ourselves being determined by our culture, where we can follow the feeling, trace it (through the historical and theoretical framework the course establishes) to our own cultural system and analyze it. When this works, we become Other to ourselves and recognize how our

culture determines us. This process de-romanticizes the longing for the Other as it brings us face to face with our own Otherness and paves the way for empathy, the human capacity to identify with others. One hopes it also leads us to open our vision and imagine that our own self/ culture can change.

This embodied type of teaching may activate uncomfortable feelings for students who are survivors of physical abuse, or who have unresolved problems. Students may displace their discomfort onto me personally, and as an out-of-the-closet lesbian I sometimes feel vulnerable to the vicissitudes of student perversity. My safety is also important, so I adhere to clearly stated policies, maintain a warm — but professional — distance, and meet with problematic students in public places.

This teaching/ learning process is not an easy one, and certainly does not work for all students. It requires a willingness to interrogate oneself that some students do not like. It challenges all of us to examine critically some of our most deeply held beliefs, and this can be unsettling — and sometimes annoying. I try to be as transparent as I can about this to my classes: I sympathize with the discomfort, I recognize that it may mean students get angry with me, and I point out that here is another such opportunity to catch oneself and begin to follow the trail again. This is a frustrating response for some students, who just get mad at me again. I hate that; I want students to like me, but that of course is my own neurosis and my own trail. I see the pedagogical effectiveness of this approach in the number of students who do catch the fire, who come to class burning with energy and curiosity.

For the others, I am understanding, and try to help them find a way to back off from the intensity that may discomfit them — perhaps another research topic that allows them to approach the subject of the body from a more detached and intellectual perspective. There is a balance to be sought here between pushing and confronting on the one hand, for those students who can tolerate it, and on the other hand guiding and suggesting for students who do not want such an intense engagement. For as I said, students who have abuse histories (for one example) could be traumatized by being asked to think about how they feel in their bodies, unpleasant memories could be triggered, and I am certainly not in a position to help them with those. So I work to respect that students come to my class with a wide variety of bodily experiences (almost all of which are unknown to me) that determine how they interact with me and with the material I present.

Underlying my approach to the subject of the body is my interest in boundaries: discursive ones, political ones, personal ones. Boundaries can be dangerous places, sites of contradiction and dangerous knowledge. But it is in such places that the structures of power become visible, understandable, changeable. For that possibility, I am willing to risk leading my students into such an adventure, to show them how bodies of knowledge and bodies of people mutually produce each other.

SYLLABUS: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BODY

Description of the course: The human body is a site/ sight of rich historical and ideological signification. This course will examine how the body, which seems to be a natural, universal fact, is also a deeply cultural symbolic construction whose analysis yields insights into structures of power and consciousness. The course is inspired by the recent intensification of scholarly discussion of the body. It

attempts to capture the complexity of this discourse in a multidisciplinary, trans-historical, and cross-cultural intellectual adventure. While it is not a chronological survey, it will interrogate Western/ European traditions and consider the deployment of the body in philosophy, religion, art, and science. It will further be concerned with uses and discourses of the body in cultures other than European.

The course is organized around three large questions about how the body is born, inspired, and created. It explores those questions in terms of tensions between nature and culture (to what extent is the body natural, cultural?), body and spirit (what does human embodiment mean?), and how discourses of power converge in and on the body (gender/ race/ class/ age).

Textbooks will include scholarly works, popular writings, and fiction. Films and videos will also be considered. WARNING: Some images may be offensive to some viewers. Although every attempt will be made to create a safe atmosphere for the scholarly consideration of these topics, this is not a course for sensitive audiences or the faint of heart.

TEACHING METHODS

The course will proceed through discussion, lecture, and audiovisual materials, and will use guest speakers and experiential activities. The subject lends itself to field trips (to a hospital, a morgue, or a drag show) and to body awareness exercises that will encourage students to consider their own critical position in regard to the material — the body as the knowing instrument.

Assignments will consist of a journal in which students will record their visceral and intellectual responses to the material, to be processed into an annotated photo album; second, a short summary and critique of a chapter from *Blood Magic*. Third is the final research and criticism project that may be a 12-15-page paper, performance, or creative undertaking, designed in consultation with the instructor. This project will proceed in the following stages (see course schedule for due dates): 1. topic proposal chosen from the list provided by the instructor; 2. an annotated bibliography of five articles or chapters (the project will ultimately require at least ten); 3. a thesis statement and plan for the project; and 4. the final project.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Michel Foucault, *Introduction to the History of Sexuality*; Alma Gottlieb and D. Buckley, eds., *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*; bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*; *Re/Search #12: Modern Primitives*; Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (NY: Pocket, 1992); Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1. *Ways of Seeing*: about representation; body metaphors in everyday language

Week 2. Guest lecture on the anthropology of why bodies are the way they are

Week 3. *Blood Magic*: menstruation and cultural systems

Week 4. Introduction to the *History of Sexuality*: bodies and power
Week 5. *Purity and Danger*: the body and its boundaries, personal and political
Week 6. *Black Looks*: the body and race
Week 7. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. TONGUES UNTIED
Week 8. Linda Williams, *Hard Core*. Andrea Dworkin, selection from
Pornography: pornography and sexual representations
Week 9. Guest lecture on BODY AND SOUL: dance
Week 10. *Re/Search #12: Modern Primitives*: the body as art: piercing and tattoo
Week 11. Presentation and discussion of final projects

NOTES

1. Anne Donnersberger, DePaul University, School for New Learning. "A Day of Learning for Faculty," December 5, 1992.
 2. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds., *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*. Berkeley: University of California, 1988.
 3. Georges Franju. BLOOD OF THE BEASTS.
 4. Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 1966.
 5. John Waters, dir. PINK FLAMINGOES. 1974.
 6. John Waters, dir. HAIRSPRAY. 1988.
 7. Uri Edel, dir. BODY OF EVIDENCE. 1992.
 8. Michel Foucault. *Introduction to the History of Sexuality Vol. I*. Trans. R. Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1980.
 9. bell hooks. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
 10. Ayoka Chenzira. HAIRPIECE.
 11. Marion Riggs. TONGUES UNTIED. 1989.
 12. Linda Williams. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible."* Berkeley: University of California, 1989.
 13. Clarissa Pinkola Estes. *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.
 14. Williams, p.5.
 15. Leslie Asako Gladsjø, dir. STIGMATA. 1993.
 16. *Re/Search #12: Modern Primitives*. San Francisco: Re/Search, 1991.
 17. Alice Walker. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Pocket, 1992.
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Straight women, gay porn, and the scene of erotic looking

by Laura U. Marks

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A straight woman who likes to go to gay men's nightclubs knows the peculiar pleasure of seeing men on full erotic display yet remaining herself practically invisible. The gay club scene provides a voyeuristic feast for a woman who wants to look at men or to learn to look at men without the implications of a look back. In the clubs she can practice a dominant sort of look and enjoy the rare spectacle of a specular male. Like many women, I have experienced the fag hag's special voyeurism at gay clubs and also at gay film festivals. In the following I would like to explore how this sort of voyeuristic looking happens in film and what its consequences might be for notions of subjectivity, identification, and ethics.

Independent filmmakers are producing a wealth of work that I would call alternative pornography: experimental works that engage with porn conventions to both arouse and provoke. There has been a tremendous amount of lesbian and gay film and video in this genre — indeed, this work is what defines it. Still precious little porn appeals to a more or less straight female viewer. I suggest that one route by which a straight woman can experience porn is by watching some kinds of alternative pornography made for gay men.

The stumbling block to women's erotic gaze at men in film has been theorized most influentially in the contention that specularity, "to-be-looked-at-ness," is the inherent property of female figures in classical narrative cinema.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] These figures, it is argued, appeal to a dominating, necessarily male gaze. Given such constraints, what, then, might constitute male specularity?

My project of male specularity has two main purposes: to reconsider the object of the gaze as male and to reconfigure the subject of the gaze as not necessarily masculine. As we will see, a female viewer faces some difficulties in occupying a viewing position that simply reverses the dominating gaze upon a passive object — a woman looking like a man. One possible mode of straight female looking at male bodies comes through masquerade — a woman looking through a man's eyes. According to another influential psychoanalytic feminist argument, to look at cinema at all, women must borrow the male gaze.[2] In this case, to look sexually at men I must masquerade as a gay man, i.e., provisionally borrow a gay male gaze. Gay porn offers me a way to look at men, overtly sexually, without being looked

back at, or in the process pulled into a heterosexual power relation that would inevitably disadvantage me. In male homoerotic imagery, because the male viewer and the male object of the gaze theoretically could switch roles at any minute, like "top" and "bottom," the power dynamic of looking is more flexible. As Kobena Mercer writes,

"The gendered hierarchy of seeing/ being seen is not so rigidly coded in homoerotic representations, since sexual sameness liquidates the associative opposition between active subject and passive object." [3]

Power dynamics do not disappear, of course; but gay porn suggests that the question of who lacks, or who is (relatively) object and who subject, gets a set of parameters other than gender.

In the years since the radical specularity of women in Hollywood cinema was first critiqued, the notion of the male gaze has been multiplied to include a range of lookers and ways of looking. Writers on gay porn, such as Julien Mercer, Tom Waugh, and Richard Fung, have suggested that objectness comes to be signified by other markers, such as age and race.[4] By now, the appropriate answer to the question of what is male specularity is, "Who wants to know?" — that is, it depends upon who is looking. Ultimately I will argue that there are multiple sorts of erotic looks that are confined neither to particular subjects nor to particular objects, looks that may be dominating or submissive or take some other relation to their object.

In the following I will be looking at works by Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier, Curt McDowell, Deke Nihilson, Greta Snider, Ming-Yuen S. Ma, and Karim Aïnouz. They all draw on the codes of hardcore gay porn but with important differences. They have in common their use of a fragmenting and objectifying look at a solo male, which makes these works seem to parallel the images of women in hetero porn. They include shots of erections or cum shots; and they all assert some kind of power relation among maker, subject/object, and viewer. These five works are by just a few of many contemporary independent film and videomakers whose work I could have considered. Some others whose works offer male bodies to the gaze include those by Lawrence Brose, Jürgen Bruning, Shu Lea Cheang, Tom Chomont, Cathy Cook, John Di Stefano, Shari Frilot, Richard Fung, John Greyson, Thomas Allen Harris, Mike Hoolboom, Isaac Julien, Bruce la Bruce, Karethe Linaae, Wrik Mead, Steve Reinke, Marion Riggs, Philippe Roque, Carolee Schneeman, Chick Strand, and Andy Warhol/ Paul Morrissey.

As you can see from this list, I have chosen to concentrate on mostly experimental independent works. Though such work is not by any means inherently critical by virtue of its alternative form, film/ video that involves formal play and fragmentation often offers more routes and fissures along/ between which to try on different looks and positions. Another difference these works have from mainstream porn is that they are more likely to present a range of sexual experiences and cultural identities. Thus a viewer takes a position in relation to them knowing that she shares the space of their address with many different viewers. This sense of displacement, I will argue, is part of what makes these works erotic. Also, as I will discuss in conclusion, the production and exhibition contexts of independent and experimental film and video change the stakes of identification, making the process at once more fluid and more charged.

Let me begin this exploration of an erotic female look at male bodies by attempting to budge some of its theoretical stumbling blocks. First, most theories of imaging the male body still accept the notion of the gaze's phallic organization. Many writers have examined how the male body is erotically available in film, but most suggest that the body must be specularized and submitted to a male gaze. The male look at men does not necessarily, indeed does not usually, consist of an explicitly homoerotic look. In the context of structuring-male-gaze arguments, films offer men a covert look at other men in the guise of moving the plot along. In mainstream film, as Steve Neale has argued, male specularity must occur in the guise of plot.[5] War movies, Westerns, and sports films, for example, permit men a variety of looks at other men — active, stripped, sweating, embracing other men — under the pretext of the story. Most of the hunky guys on display for female viewers fall into this category too — Stallone's rippling muscles seeming more like skin-toned armor than like flesh — in order to remind us that while they are on display they also still remain in control, still agents of movement. Critics' derisive responses to some male actors' less-than-perfect butts — as with Michael Douglas's dorsal nudity in *Basic Instinct* or David Caruso's "cottage cheese" derriere in *NYPD Blue* — indicate the signs of horror that images of a soft, disarmed male body provokes.

The problem with men and spectacle, according to the filmic conventions we have come to accept, is that the will to narrative cannot countenance a male figure who is both subject and object, who functions both as carrier of the plot and object of desire. Richard Dyer suggests that the male protagonist, supposedly representing the phallus or phallic identification with the movement of plot, cannot very well also exhibit himself as object of phallic desire. Gay porn, Dyer writes, offers a particularly volatile site of masculinity construction. In gay porn, while the body is exposed in its finiteness and vulnerable uniqueness, it must uphold an image of hardness, impenetrability, and mastery.

"The fact is that the penis isn't a patch on the phallus. The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus. Hence the excessive, even hysterical quality of so much male imagery. The clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws, the proliferation of phallic symbols — they are all straining after what can be hardly achieved, the embodiment of the phallic mystique." [6]

Of course, gay homoerotic imagery offers alternatives in which the construction of masculinity becomes more complicated — the stereotyped gentleness of the Asian male, the softer masculinity of the bearded "bear," the slim, graceful youth (what Waugh calls the *ephebe* in his forthcoming study of early homoerotic photography), [7] the erotic subjection of the pierced, tattooed, or bound male body. In many cases these images, arriving from the fringes of film and video production, find a place in commercial porn. Nevertheless, the hard body with its unmistakable signifiers of masculinity remains the standard, and the deviations are threatening as well as arousing. Given this volatility, gay porn offers a site of crisis not only for conventions of filmic narrative but also for masculinity.

In light of this crisis, it is fun to see how some gay porn plays with the "action" pretext for looking at male bodies. Using the most minimal signifiers of active, masculine narratives — boot camp, cop stories, etc. — gay porn abandons the story

the instant the male body is under specular "arrest" to exploit instead the male body as spectacle.[8] Gay male porn does not have exact parallels to female specularity. Does the specularized body still function as a fetish, reassuring the male viewer of his wholeness by contrast with another's lack? Yes, insofar as close-up shots of fucking insist that one partner "has it" while the other does not. But no, insofar as the positions can and do switch.

Another writer on the filmic representation of the male body, Peter Lehman, argues along the lines of Dyer that pornography represents a site of crisis; in order to keep up the myth of male mastery, on which the conventions of narrative cinema depend, the male body can't be shown. Lehman argues that hardcore porn "constantly attempts to link the penis to the phallus." [9] In other words, hardcore conflates the structure of filmic signification, which is based on the phallus as a privileged signifier, with the male stars' actual endowments and activities. Like Dyer, he argues that the genre cannot tolerate small or unerect penises because that organ is supposed to carry the symbolic weight of the film.

All these ways of describing the gay male gaze present a problem for me. While Dyer is talking about gay porn, Lehman about straight, and Neale about straight cinema that affords a homoerotic look, they all rely on a similar notion of the structuring male gaze. These theories of imaging the male body still assume a masculine viewing subject. Thus the look, in addition to being male, remains dominating, penetrating. The straight female viewer, then — in fact, anyone who wants to undertake a different sort of look from the one here proposed — still faces a problem of how to look. The male body remains like Teflon, off which female looks glance with nary a scratch.

To get around this problem — to find a "way in" to the male body, as it were — we need to wrestle once again with the theory that the look at film is fundamentally phallic, a theory based on a particular model of subjectivity. Perhaps the reader shares my own frustration with the tortured psychoanalytic arguments that still seem to be *de rigueur* for a theory of film spectatorship. Nevertheless, at this point in film theory's development, I think one can only move on to other theories of looking after carefully considering these arguments. My chosen method is to begin with the Lacanian *doxa* and withdraw via psychoanalysis' ugly stepchild, object relations theory. Let us briefly consider some ways to complicate the phallic basis of masculine subjectivity. By showing that masculine subject formation is in fact a fraught and inconclusive process, these approaches reconfigure the notion of the phallic look and support the idea that indeed the male body can be the object of the look.

A critical Lacanian analysis attempts to posit a nonphallic male subjectivity, a subjectivity that acknowledges its fundamental lack of power.[10] Since the all-powerful gaze, which exists independently of any viewer, is quite distinct from the look, which pertains to the eye of an individual viewer, the dominating gaze is *not* male. Men are just in a better position to identify their individual looks with an abstract, omniscient gaze. Yet this identification occurs asymptotically. Watching a porn film, one occupies a position of mastery over the film's eroticized object only to the degree that one submits to this dominating gaze. Thus Kaja Silverman argues that voyeurism, far from being a dominant viewing position, presents a situation in which one is *least* in control. The problem is not that the female is

looked at and the male looks: men are just as specular (and as powerless) as women are. Film can help us realize this by literalizing male powerlessness at the same time that it foils the gaze. However, the pleasure of voyeuristic looking seems to evaporate: to adopt a position like this is to deprive any viewer of a powerful viewing position.

Something in the psychoanalytic program to reveal lack at the foundation of male subjectivity makes me uncomfortable. My unease crystallizes when, in order to invent a non-oppressive model of desire, Silverman offers up as ideal erotic object the "fantasmatic kissing organ." This would function like a roving pair of lips, capable as well of vision and smell, similar to what Proust evoked as the instrument for his love for Albertine. Silverman writes about the importance of this impossible object (which for some reason I visualize as a tropical fish): it is not defined in terms of sexual difference. Rather, it has an importance as "an organ which is absent to every subject" (despite its markedly labial quality). In an eroticism based around such an organ, not only women but also men would have to confront their lack of the defining object of sexuality — in other words, their castration. I can't help finding the notion of a sexuality based on detumescence and non-penetration, à la Andrea Dworkin, rather depressing.[11] Videomaker Hurbis-Cherrier captures this discomfort when she writes,

"I have trouble with a desire based on lack, even if it is an equal-opportunity lack."

Accepting Silverman's argument, it would seem that there is *no* erotic way to look at the male body, since to make it the object of the gaze is simultaneously to deflate it, castrate it, make it undesirable. Once again, just as I get the opportunity to look, my object gets seized from me! Yet it seems appropriate to ask, if indeed nobody owns desire, doesn't that make it safe to pretend that I do?

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, one cannot attain subjectivity; in psychoanalysis focusing on prelinguistic, pre-oedipal phases, attaining subjectivity is just difficult. The preoedipal register of subjectivity is not structured around phallic power. It is less of an all-or-nothing scenario and more one of ambivalence and vacillation. And as far as the issue of the male gaze goes, preoedipal subject theory radically disputes the idea that there is only one such gaze, that it is solely dominating, and perhaps that only men have access to it. This approach to male subjectivity breaks down both the driving power of the male gaze and the requisite "hardness" of the specular male without shattering them completely.

Paul Smith introduces an intriguing *scrotal* metaphor of male subjectivity in his essay "Vas." [12] Rather than subtracting the phallus from the equation of the male imaginary, Smith makes it part of a larger baggage. He draws from Michèle Montrelay's theory of a dynamic instability in the male imaginary. Montrelay uses a biologism that I find disarming, given the historical tendency of psychoanalysis to mire only women in their physical bodies. She posits that ejaculation is experienced as a threatened destruction of the subject. Smith posits this kind of vulnerability to suggest not, as Silverman does, that masculinity is founded upon an irremediable crisis, but that the phallus is only a relative term in male subjectivity. It follows, if we continue to accept the phallic structure of

signification, that at the same point that the phallus ceases to be central to male sexuality, there is a loss of the power of symbolization — and instead, a power of *va(s)cillation*. Despite the essentialist ring in Smith's essay, it is rather welcome to posit a male closeness to the body, an inarticulateness, of the sort that has been theorized about female subjectivity. Men, the scrotum metaphor suggests, carry around a lot of baggage, have both desire and anxiety.

To this source of male multivalency we may add the bisexual yearning of the oral stage, a source of fragmentation that is not castration anxiety but a desire for the sense of completeness with the mother's body. Gaylyn Studlar opposes the Metzian/ Lacanian paradigm in which a film viewer identifies with a phallic and sadistic gaze, arguing instead that spectatorship is fundamentally masochistic. The pleasure of looking, she argues, is based on the *submissive* pleasure that an infant has looking at its mother.[13]

Spectatorship defined this way becomes less a matter of aligning oneself with an all-powerful gaze or perish, and more a matter of trying on various viewing positions, not untraumatically but not entirely destructively. Based on preoedipal subject formation, the masochistic model of spectatorship affirms a fundamentally bisexual or multigendered sort of look. Also, because it draws on a formative phase in which the subject is testing out its differentiation from the mother, masochistic spectatorship permits exploration of different sexual identities without the sort of trauma that accompanies Oedipal-phase identity formation. Oral-phase identity formation has its own traumas, more associated with the question of whether a discrete identity exists at all than with gender identity or sexual preference.

A look compounded from these difficult phases of subject formation will be anything but phallic. If the structuring look at cinema includes all this, then surely there are ways for female viewers to get into a masculine viewing position. These approaches offer ways to think of the male body as open to view, and to think of the so-called male gaze as a highly unstable and shifting one. Now, is looking still any fun? Let's consider the above a toolbox of ways to look, and thus equipped, experiment in looking at men on film.

Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier's videotape *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* (1993) offers a rare example of an erotic work that invites a straight female look at a male body, which she eroticizes according to certain conventions of pornography. We see shots of a naked male body (but never his face) in different playful settings. While the man reclines in an armchair, little paper balloons gently bombard his genitals from off-camera. While he prepares breakfast, his penis and balls are reflected in a shiny toaster — no doubt an homage to the use of a similar shot in Stan Brakhage's masturbation film *FLESH OF MORNING* (1956). As in conventional porn, the man's body is fragmented and fetishized; most of the shots are medium shots of the torso and genitals. Unlike in conventional porn, the penis is rarely shown erect. A voice-over reads a playful ode to a woman's lover's penis. The tape constructs an alternative phallic iconography, e.g., using a time-lapse science film of unfurling sprouts, the balloons, and the poet's inventive words to celebrate the penis' buoyancy, its retractability — "I draw you out like a turtle."

Clearly the fragmentation and objectification of this male body take place within the context of a love relationship, not least because the videomaker credits her spouse at the end of the tape. Nevertheless, the strength of *YOU(R) SEX AND*

OTHER STUFF is that it makes room for an unequal power relation. It overtly turns the tables on conventional sexual representation, putting the male body squarely in the position of object and the female videomaker and viewer in the position of voyeurs. But this delightful videotape has a coyness which is perhaps inevitable. Watching it makes me keenly aware of the woman behind the camera. That her male subject granted permission works against the spectatorial position of pure voyeurism. Such mutuality is desirable in a world without preexisting configurations of power. Given the structures Hurbis-Cherrier must work within, the standard is that the male looks and the female is looked at. A viewer who shares Hurbis-Cherrier's aim cannot help feeling that the positions of voyeur and looked-upon in YOU(R) SEX could too easily switch. The female viewer of YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF thus remains aware of her position as a potential object of the gaze as well.

Let us take a look at Curt McDowell's 1972 RONNIE, a film in which power relations are at least as complicated as they are in YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF. Like other vérité films McDowell made about the Bay Area gay scene in the 70s, as well as some Warhol/ Morrissey productions, RONNIE explores and exploits the filmmaker's relation of power to the hustlers he picks up. They are usually poor and black, though Ronnie is white. The short film consists of McDowell's shots of the young man in the filmmaker's apartment, drinking a beer, talking into a microphone, gradually disrobing, submitting to the scrutiny of McDowell's camera, briefly letting the filmmaker fellate him, and jerking off. On the sound track Ronnie describes the afternoon's events and frankly celebrates himself.

A mimic by trade, Ronnie is open to the projections of anyone who buys his time. His disavowal of being gay is part of what makes him available to a variety of fantasies. He tells us, for example, that after the filmmaker "did something" to him, even though it is something he "doesn't do," "I hit my climax. So imagine if I was with a pussy, a nice warm juicy pussy." Even Ronnie's misogynist protestations are duplicitous, as in this part of the monologue, which is accompanied by increasingly intimate shots of his body. His excuses for letting the stranger give him a blow job refer to performance — you have to act for the camera; women ("cunts") do this all the time.

Ronnie both disavows and embraces a comparison to women, particularly to female prostitutes. His specific comparison of himself to a woman makes a viewer (one who is pursuing this project of looking at men through men's eyes) keenly aware that it is easiest for a man to place himself as the object of erotic looking if he borrows a feminine position. But Ronnie longs to be other than he is, which makes his mimicry all the more complicated. "I wish I was black, he says. "It's not my favorite color — I'm sorry, sisters and brothers, blue is" — but, he tells us, he's writing a book on relations between black and white people. In this parodic collage of stud, "cunt," wanna-be black, and other self-images, Ronnie constitutes himself as a spectacle in the way Silverman describes.

Tensions between voice-over and image in RONNIE, and between the film's production and viewing contexts, permit a wide and even conflicting variety of looks and desires in relation to the film. The production context was doubtless exploitative, though the degree of exploitation partly depends on the viewer's view

of prostitution. The film's gesture of "giving voice" to the hustler can be understood as either generous or cruelly mocking. Thus identification with the filmmaker's look already is charged with the spectator's uneasy awareness of power. While Ronnie makes his contradictory spiel, the film opens his image to a number of ways of looking that both corroborate and undermine his words, making this film viewing positions even more multivalent. Even the hustler's tape-recorded address to posterity sets up a means for identification that ironically contrasts with the film's visual information:

"I have to go now, so I just want to say I'm a wonderful person, and all youse blondes, just look me up in California, I'll be waiting for you, it's up to you, I'm not forcing you."

This appeal to straight, white women plays over a cum shot, his spurting penis towering from a low camera angle, which is right out of gay porn.

Ronnie's last words to his audience are,

"A word to the wise: As they say, love the one you're with."

His ambiguity, his disavowal of his position as a hustler makes a number of different fantasy scenarios possible for viewers. We're invited to be with him to the extent that we can accommodate him to our own desires. It is easy for me, a straight woman, to take advantage of this invitation and drop in on McDowell's intimate looks upon Ronnie's body. They include a near-portrait of Ronnie sitting on the floor smoking, talking easily; fetishizing close-ups of his lips, his dick and balls, his butt, his hands; a rather poetic image with a sheer curtain billowing around him; a survey of his rigidly posed, prone body that renders Ronnie an inviting landscape. My pleasure in looking derives partly from taking advantage of the filmmaker's privileged view, partly in seeing Ronnie differently through his eyes. I may enter as an interloper in McDowell's look at the hustler's body, but the film lets me not only borrow that look but use it to see different things.

The first two works I have described involve a straight woman's and a gay man's erotic look upon a man; in both cases, these views were also the look of the cinematographer. Now I offer a look at erotic male nudity that does not explicitly imply any outside viewer. This is a section of Greta Snider's compilation film *SHRED OF SEX* (1991). To make this film Snider invited her many housemates to enact their fantasies for the camera and she hand-processed and compiled the results. Shown at a rent party, *SHRED OF SEX* only later achieved its cult status on the independent film circuit. This fragment, which is sometimes singled out for exhibition separately from the rest of the film, contains a narcissistic, autoerotic display.

Its subject, Deke Nihilson, simply left Snider's camera running while he performed. Nihilson, a muscular young man with a mohawk haircut and a big penis, masturbates (a little awkwardly) lying on his skateboard until he comes.[14] The film aestheticizes this hard-core image by the solarizing effect of hand-processing: the young punk's body gleams and flows like mercury. Snider's processing plays up his exotic looks and his muscularity while also involving the viewer in the erotic tactility of the film's surface. Because he is performing alone for a static camera, the way we look at Nihilson is ambiguous. Since we watch so far removed from the

scene, we enjoy him from a space of extreme voyeurism as though through a one-way mirror. Yet also we seem to occupy his own adoring gaze upon himself. However, since this film was made in collaboration with Snider, we participate in her eroticization of his image, similarly to Hurbis-Cherrier's treatment of her subject. A final possible viewing position, that of a member of a coalition, I will suggest later.

Karim Aïnouz's *PAIXAO NACIONAL* (1994) provides a brief meditation on the many inequalities that underlie erotic fascination. Unlike the other films I have discussed, this film invites a viewer into a fictional narrative. The entire film is shot as though from the point of view of a Northern tourist in Brazil, organized around his gaze upon the landscape and upon the Brazilian young man who embodies his "national passion." The tourist is never pictured. While the camera sweeps verdant landscapes, the tourist's voice-over describes how he feels the sensuality of this country seeping into him. "His" camera greedily follows the brown-skinned, lightly clad youth who, running on the beach, laughingly eludes it. Finally he reclines and submits to an intimate pan of his body, the camera nervously moving over his genitals. The overdetermined relations of north and south, rich and poor, john and hustler, tourist and native redouble themselves in these images and the fantasies on the sound track.

The youth's voice tells a very different story of the seduction; his words come to us only in a text over black leader. Throughout these scenes in which he gambols for the camera, the words suggest that his thoughts remain elsewhere, with his sister, his friends, his desire to get out of the country. The disparity becomes more violent when the words reveal that the boy has smuggled himself into the cargo of a plane to the U.S.. Indeed they are his last words. He grows cold; he becomes afraid. We have to assume that he dies in this desperate attempt to trace the route that so easily brought the tourist to Brazil.[15]

In *PAIXAO NACIONAL* the power differential between tourist and Brazilian remains uncomfortably acute. The boy's objectification is not limited to a few shots in the surf but caught up in the relation between poor and wealthy, South and North, the one who lives in the daily reality of home and the one who abides in the temporary fantasy of travel. Although the film shows an encounter between hustler and camera-wielding john, as in *RONNTE*, the contractual character of the exchange becomes less certain, given the international and intercultural dimensions of the relation between tourist and local.

In *PAIXAO NACIONAL* the viewer is practically forced to inhabit the tourist's vision since he is never seen and all the images of young man and landscape seem to originate from his camera. This utter voyeurism has an unnerving effect. The viewer identifies with a look that extricates itself from identification with one individual and becomes the gaze of power itself. This sense that omniscient looking comes at the price of annihilation of the self recalls Silverman's argument that voyeurism sets up a situation where there's loss of control. The tourist's individuality, and the viewer's insofar as she takes his position, becomes annihilated in the broad gesture of mastery, in the sweep of the camera across the landscape. Meanwhile the presence of the young Brazilian's subjectivity, expressed only in subtitled Portuguese voice over, keeps a viewer from forgetting or naturalizing this power relation. A female viewer searching this work for a way to

look at a male body must confront the mutually destructive implications of a look of mastery in a way that probably overtakes the pleasure of looking.

Another take on male specularity, Ming-Yuen S. Ma's *SLANTED VISION* (1996), takes an equally complex approach to the gay male look across nations and races, although the tone is not elegiac, as in *PAIXAO*, so much as manic. This tape is concerned with both the image of Asian men in the North American homoerotic imaginary and the use of porn among gay Asian Americans. Ma points out that Asian men, if they are visible in gay porn at all, invariably become positioned as "bottoms" for studly white actors.[16] His work sets up a double intervention: First he nails the way homoerotic representations stereotype Asian men as gentle and receptive. In one sequence, set in a bar, a variety of people address pick-up lines to the camera as though to an Asian man, showing the easy slippage between orientalism, objectification, and domination. "You're beautiful," one man says. "Turn around...and over..." In reverse shots, the silent recipient, who wears a sort of Madame Butterfly drag, gradually removes his outfit in a non-verbal rebuttal. Later, interviews with a number of Asian diaspora men critique stereotyping by highlighting range of sexual practices and attitudes among them.

The second aspect of *SLANTED VISION*'s intervention is to claim the *pleasure* of being a bottom. One Asian porn actor explains, "It made me feel desirable to be objectified" — he finds pleasure in a renunciative position, even if one supposedly masochistic. Another interviewee tells how he enjoyed a sexual encounter in which he was humiliated, because the other man was giving him so much *attention*. To introduce this theme is a bold move, for Ma faces criticism for reaffirming the racist stereotype of Asian passivity. Yet he makes a compelling case that the masochistic or passive or feminine position can offer a site of pleasure.

Sexually explicit scenes in this tape reframe commercial gay porn to question of who owns the look. One complex sequence combines two views of the same scene of two Asian men making love, played by Ma and Napoleon Lustre. The first view is composed entirely of medium and long shots with few edits and avoids the fragmentation of bodies, rather like the "natural," unobjectifying porn films made for female audiences by companies like Femme Productions. Its sound track breaks the narrative illusion, though, because on it we hear the live sound from the video shoot. (Additional sound tracks further complicate the scene, including a prayer-like poem by Napoleon about having AIDS and his mother taking him to Lourdes for a cure.) The other view, a series of aestheticized images shot so close that particular anatomy is unrecognizable, comes from cameras the lovers are using. It has a quite different eroticism, more of an Irigaray-esque intimacy between eye and skin. Music plays on the sound track. The effect of these two sequences is to let the viewer experience two very different forms of erotic looking, one narrative and one abstract. Halfway through the sequence, the sound tracks for the two sets of images switch. The effect is astonishing: initially, the intrusion of the other sound track deconstructs each scene's naturalness. Yet ultimately it compounds its erotic effect by playing with the viewer's awareness of the different levels at which eroticism can work.

Ma organizes one erotic scene around a female gaze at a male body. In this scene, a female hand guides the camera's slow pan across a male body. The hand holds a 3" monitor on which plays a conventional gay porn tape of an Asian man being fucked

by white man. As in the sequence I just described, the film presents two different modes of erotic viewing in the same scene. Ma, whom I met while I was working on this article, asked me to provide a voice-over describing why I like to look at gay men's images of men. What I said turned out to be a version of this essay with its glasses removed (and maybe in stilettos). Here is an excerpt:

"When I look at images of gay men, made for gay men, I can look all I want, I can devour the image, let my eyes move over ass thighs cock nipples, like my eyes are hands or a tongue. I can do whatever I want to this image with my eyes, can fantasize being in that position of domination that would be very hard to if directed to me as a woman."

"Looking at gay porn, I borrow a gay man's look at other men, drop in on a man's desiring gaze at another man. Because it's two men, there's a feeling of playfulness I long for between looker and looked at, taking turns looking/ being looked, touching and being touched, fucking/ being fucked, top/ bottom. There's a feeling that they can switch. At the same time the vanquishment of a man, a man giving in to pleasure, to being *done* to, is exciting because it's so rare in hetero images."

"I hate theories that we must disarm the phallic, objectifying gaze upon others' bodies. Gives too much power to this kind of look; says in effect that phallic looking is so dangerous *nobody* is allowed to do it. Just when I got a chance to get my own looks in! Don't want everybody to be disarmed, equal, touchy-feely, always treating each other like full subjects. It's a tedious democracy of looking. It's a bore."

"What I want is for the power to flow around more. I want a chance to have a phallic female gaze — given that this power is short-term and contingent as any other kind of looking. I don't think anything wrong with dominating ways of looking. But I want to think they're ways of looking that people can trade around, like you trade being top and bottom. I'm not interested in women objectifying men, to make up for all that history of the other way around. But I do want to see men a little more permeable, subjectible, susceptible."

Gay porn offers a good site for female viewers to test out the power of our own look. In male-male exchanges in film, power differences are usually an overt thematic. This maintains even in homoerotic representations, where the difference that impels the narrative is often one of power — in myriad, unstable relationships such as hustler/ john, black/ white, master/ protégé. For a female viewer to enter such an erotic scene means entering a power relation as well. In the above statement I introduced a model of spectatorship based on s/m, which I will now unpack. This model, indebted to Gaylyn Studlar's theory of masochistic spectatorship, takes a somewhat more willful slant than Studlar does. I chose male homoerotic imagery as an object for a female look precisely because it affords a distant, dominating look, an ultimate voyeurism, in which the viewer is utterly removed from the scene. By disagreeing with (or disavowing) the Lacanian argument, I am fighting the notion of castration because I want a chance to have the phallus too! Rather than disempower the "male" gaze, I propose to phallicize the "female" one.

"Progressive" pornography faces the challenge of reconfiguring the relation between looker and looked — at such that that relation does not necessarily correspond to dominator and dominated. I do not want to argue in favor of replacing porn with what is known as "erotica," with its implications of soft focus, lack of power differentials (as if such a thing were possible) and bourgeois good taste. Indeed, erotica simply masks and maintains existing power relations. Rather, the redefinition of desire centers around reconceiving the subject-object relation in looking as a relation between two subjects. Not two free and equal, Habermasian ideal subjects but two people between whom power relations are continually being negotiated. Eroticism relies on this shifting and promising inequality. As Jessica Benjamin writes,

"What distinguishes Eros from perversion is not freedom from fantasies of power and surrender, for Eros does not purge sexual fantasy — it plays with it. The idea of destruction reminds us that the element of aggression remains necessary in erotic life; it provides an element of *survival*, the difference the other can make, which distinguishes erotic union—which plays with the fantasy of domination — from real domination." [17]

Domination provides a necessary part of erotic relations, in other words—and thus so does an "objectifying" gaze. What Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity suggests is that we can have no erotic relation when there is an *utter* division of subject and object, or in the case of visual imagery, of looker and looked-at. Eroticism depends upon a tension between the sense of control and submission on each person's part rather than complete domination on one side and complete submission on the other. Similarly, visual eroticism plays with the *relations* of identification.

In thinking about the construction of male subjectivity we have seen that the subject-object division and identification with the phallus as symbol of power are by no means perfectly replicated in the production of masculinity. If masculinity is indeed constructed around vacillation, then spaces are opened up in male representation for multiple desires. If we can acknowledge that power does indeed circulate, that intersubjective relations are based upon negotiated relations of power, then we have room for a contingent form of control. If the gaze is dominating, at least we can take turns wielding it — as in meetings where whoever is sitting in the "rotating chair" gets to speak.

To recognize the contingency of power upon position makes it possible to enjoy the privileges of power in a limited way. This includes the privilege of temporary alignment with a controlling, desiring, and objectifying gaze while acknowledging its contingency on shifting power relations. Mulvey's argument about spectatorship did not refer to an erotic form of looking but to fetishism, the reduction of another to an object. Perhaps a rigid division between subject and object underpins the "phallic" gaze. But in an erotic look a fluidity of movement occurs between these positions. It includes both a position of absolute voyeuristic control and of experiencing oneself as an object.

I am thinking of s/m as a model for this sort of looking relation. The model I propose is not "sadomasochism in everyday life," the banal normalization of dominance and submission that pervades our patriarchal culture. Hence my use of a term that describes a bedroom practice, s/m, rather than one that pertains to a

psychoanalytic condition, sadomasochism. I am thinking of s/m as performance — a relation more like the intense but transient relationship of viewer to screen image.

I define s/m quite specifically as the limited, contractual relation in which two people consent to play out a fantasy relation of dominance and submission. In this ideal definition, the arena created is a safe space, at a remove from other patterns of life and of this particular relationship. Roles of "subject" and "object" (words that, I acknowledge, no longer adequate to the situation I am trying to evoke) are acknowledged as roles. An s/m model of spectatorship permits the contingent playing with power that I advocate as a model of looking. Film spectatorship, Studlar argues, is organized around a masochistic relation (and not the sadistic relation of the Metzian paradigm) insofar as the film spectator allows herself to be seduced into a mutually contracted agreement.

S/m uses theatricality as a central feature: a fundamental trust that the partners can suspend their roles functions throughout the fantasy. This relation is, of course, similar to that which obtains in a movie theater when a viewer indulges a powerful, objectifying look at an object while disavowing/ acknowledging that the relation is limited to a specific space and is fundamentally fantastic. As play — sex play or fantasy or the temporary immersion in the movies — s/m can intervene in conventional alignments of power and spectatorship. Studlar argues that by returning the player to a state of polymorphous perversity, masochism

"demonstrates the easy exchange of power roles that are rigidly defined within the patriarchal sexual hegemony. In masochism, the power plays of sexuality are made explicitly theatrical and ritualized so that their naturalness is exposed as a construct." [18]

Far from reaffirming cultural power roles of dominance and submission, to accept an s/m-based spectatorial relation actually mocks those roles.

In a seeming paradox, this role playing aligns with what Studlar defines as masochistic spectatorship. Studlar is talking about the masochist in every viewer, and I am interested to find the dominating gaze in every viewer, especially those who aren't used to having one. This is no paradox, for both these positions become possible as role plays within the delimited fantasy space of the cinema. The masochistic viewer, in a position to test out various identities and relations, operates like the participant in s/m scenarios, experimenting within a safe, delimited space.

In the films and videos I have discussed, relations of looking are constructed like s/m relations. Domination and submission occur within the viewing situation's consensual and limited space. A viewer who in other situations might be loath to assume a dominating role can try on power like a costume. In *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF*, a female viewer can try out looking in an objectifying way at a man, though the heterosexual exchange implicit in the video means that she still may feel subject to that look herself. With a male homoerotic film like *RONNIE*, she remains an utter voyeur, not present in the picture at all; she thus gets to occupy the intimate and invasive look that McDowell extends toward his subject. Since *SHRED OF SEX* was made through the autoerotic look of Deke Nihilson, she gains a degree of permission to look at him objectifyingly. Nihilson is a self-styled

specular male, a punk-rock Garbo, whose beauty is a function of his narcissistic gaze upon himself.

In PAIXAO NACIONAL the position of voyeur begins to get in trouble. Here the contractual fantasy relation between viewer and subject does not obtain in the first place. One senses that while the exchange remains fantasy for the tourist, whose images comprise the film's visuals, it is in deadly earnest for the Brazilian boy. Thus the position of voyeur brings with it a sense that the boundaries on which the s/m exchange depends have been irrevocably breached. The film suggests that some parameters make the power relation between viewer and viewed especially fraught. Power differentials that obtain outside the s/m relationship, such as class and ethnicity, test the participants' ability to play with their mutual boundaries. SLANTED VISION plays knowingly with these differentials in contractual relation between voyeur and viewed, in effect testing the viewer's ability to disavow power responsibly.

In conclusion, let me explore how independent, experimental porn films of the sort I have described invite coalition audiences for erotic identification. The negotiation that characterizes the sadomasochistic looking relation particularly characterizes the spectator's relation to independent films. In a large-scale commercial film, we more accurately characterize primary identification as identification with the apparatus itself.

In independent films, with their smaller crews and multi-functional director, the relation of power in viewing becomes closely tied to a relation among the individuals involved in the production. In RONNIE and YOU(R) SEX, as well as works by artists such as Chomont, Harris, Hoolboom, and la Bruce, the filmmaker performs as cinematographer in what is more or less a documentary encounter. All the works I have mentioned represent, at some level, the relation between filmmaker and imaged subject. A viewer's identification with the look of the camera becomes more volatile, because it is more likely to be closely aligned with the filmmaker's look, partly because many filmmakers are both director and cinematographer but also because the entire project tends to be more hands on — perhaps more authorial — than commercial cinema. Also, such films more often critically explore the apparatus itself: SLANTED VISION and PAIXAO NACIONAL are explicit examples of this, as are works by makers such as Reinke and Snider.

Low-budget porn films often attempt to imitate large productions' anonymity and authority. However, porn, by virtue of its documentary kernel (attested to by a concern with the cum shot, the veracity of female orgasm, etc.) also calls on a relation of identification that is different from the fantasy relations at work in fiction cinema, such as the Sternberg films on which Studlar based her study. Identification in porn does not simply rely on an immersion in fantasy but also on a relation to the dynamics at work between filmmaker (director, cinematographer) and actor/ subject. Thus the power relations at work in these films are not simply those of the narrative but structural.

In the independent, quasi-pornographic films I discuss here, these qualities combine to complicate the spectatorial process. The viewer of RONNIE may choose to identify with the filmmaker's controlling, manipulative stance. This identification is much more than identification with the look of the camera (Metz's primary identification). McDowell's relation to Ronnie as pickup, patron, and

(briefly) lover, as well as framer, offers a complex position with which the viewer makes some sort of alliance. Similarly, in *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* the viewer takes a position in relation to Hurbis-Cherrier's playful objectification of her husband's body. Snider's role as impetus, accomplice, and (in other scenes) actor in *SHRED OF SEX* forces the viewer to take a position in relation to her while gazing upon Nihilson's gleaming body. *SLANTED VISION* makes it quite clear that the viewer of a porn scene is implicated in its production, through Ma's self-conscious use of the apparatus. Only in *PAIXAO NACIONAL* does the viewer have some distance from the position of filmmaker Aïnouz. The viewer becomes uncomfortably aware of her alliance with the invisible tourist's dominating look and loaded wallet, but because of the fictional narrative, she need not trace the hungry gaze upon the Brazilian landscape and the laughing youth back to Aïnouz' camera. Because these films foreground the powerful position of the filmmaker, they exploit the adversarial relation between filmmaker and subject. Rather than disavow power, these films are produced out of the very process of struggle or negotiation between the two.

Like s/m, spectatorial identification is a contingent, experimental process. The contractual character of the viewing situation I have described implies that a viewer can make a pact with many viewing situations. One agrees, under limited circumstances, to occupy a certain position. What I am describing is not simply the process of cross-identification but the shifting, volatile relation defined by a viewer's membership in a mixed audience. In an audience that includes a coalition of different interests, the spectatorial contract exists not just between the viewing individual and the screen space but among a group.

RONNIE, for example, was re-released in 1992 as part of "Flesh Histories," a two-hour program compiled by filmmaker Tom Kahn. The difference between its original and new context suggests other ways the film is available to a number of erotic engagements. The entire program contains about thirty works, ranging from abstract/ activist to feminist/ punk, which appeal to all sorts of sexual identification. They have in common an interest in redefining desire; it is with that awareness that the viewer sees *RONNIE*. The "address" of these works is disputable because of the way they abut and seep into each other, changing each other's meanings. Whether or not one knows the sexual orientation of the makers and characters, they all come out queer. Similarly, the wonderful thing about *SHRED OF SEX*, of which Deke Nihilson's self-imaging forms a part, is that this a compilation film represents a dazzling range of sexual preferences and practices. Nihilson shares the celluloid with same-sex and mixed-sex individuals, pairs and groups whose activities range from tender to violent, from partner-switching to golden showers.

This mix of identifications and addresses characterizes compilation works such as *SHRED OF SEX*, *FLESH HISTORIES*, and Shu Lea Cheang's *THOSE FLUTTERING OBJECTS OF DESIRE*, a collection of 20 works by women involved in interracial relationships.[19] The works are also similar to the mixed screenings at lesbian and gay film festivals, such as the late night "Cruiserama"-type program at the New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. As one might expect, audiences at these mixed screenings become extremely volatile. Sometimes the audience has an exhilarated sense of cumulative eroticism where, for example, gay viewers borrow the thrill of lesbian style, lesbians groove on gay male eroticism, bi women enjoy

both lesbian imagery and the borrowed look at male bodies, and all viewers have the opportunity to enjoy the eroticism of a sexuality different from their own. At other times, audience members become anxious during the minutes when their own sexuality is not interpellated on the screen, and they make catcalls and other protests until images that "speak to" them return to the screen. This most likely occurs in a context where lesbian and gay representations are relatively rare and embattled, and any lapse in these representations may be perceived as a threat. [20]

All these works and events appeal sequentially to a range of sexual identifications, such that a viewer, rather than waiting for her particular practice to appear on screen, negotiates a desiring relation to a number of other practices. It is interesting to learn where particular viewers of these compilations draw lines with regard to what turns them on, what they find mildly interesting, and what repels them. The mutual participation of a group of people — an audience — in these fantasy situations enhances the experience of forming identifications *across* identities. Douglas Crimp points out that identity "is always a *relation*, never simply a positivity." [21] The "identification across identities" of which Crimp writes means that identities are never static but always relational, capable of creating links among different groups that *transform* those groups.

Let me return once more to Silverman's argument that the gaze belongs to no one. According to this, it won't help my project in the long run to claim the gaze for women, because that only maintains the phallocentrism around which it's constructed: it's kind of a liberal-feminist gaze. Instead, I want to make a claim for the specificity of looks, for their contextuality, and for how erotic and political relations change with the situation. Love the one you're with: look in a way that is contingently phallic and contextually erotic. [22]

NOTES

1. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (1975). There is a bracing effect in beginning with this most rigorous and indeed pessimistic set of arguments posited by feminist psychoanalytic film theory when discussing spectatorship. Here I trace them to their conclusion, perhaps cul-de-sac, in more recent psychoanalytic work on spectatorship and subjectivity. I then open up the argument by invoking psychoanalytic work that takes a certain distance from Lacanian theory. More important, the independent films and videos I describe are produced and exhibited in contexts that, as Mulvey was the first to note, offer alternatives to the scopic regime of mainstream cinema. Significantly, Mulvey not only critiqued the dominant gaze but in her own filmmaking explored an inherently critical kind of looking: this legacy is evident in contemporary independent, experimental work.
2. See Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
3. Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *How Do! Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 182.
4. See for example Mercer, *ibid.*, Thomas Waugh, "The Third Body: Patterns in the

Construction of the Subject in Gay Male Narrative Film," in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993), and Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Male Porn," in *How Do I Look?*

5. Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," *Screen* 26:6 (Nov./Dec. 1983): 2-16.

6. Richard Dyer. "Don't Look Now: The Instabilities of the Male Pin-Up," *Screen* 23(1982); reprinted in *Only Entertainment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 116.

7. See Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, forthcoming from St. Martin's Press, 1996.

8. An amusing and surprisingly touching videotape by Robert Blanchon plays on this tension between narrative and sexual spectacle in gay porn. LET'S JUST KISS AND SAY GOOD-BYE (1995) isolates those micro-narratives that set up the sex scenes in gay porn films (for example, a camper meets a park ranger: "Hi. Nice hat." "You want to try it on?"). Blanchon edits them into a fractured story of hypermasculine intimacy. Playing on the sound track, the title song gives these brief meetings a feeling of unbearable nostalgia.

9. Peter Lehman. *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Philadelphia: Temple U Press, 1993), 93.

10. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (NY: Routledge, 1992).

11. Julia Lesage points out that in Dworkin's case it is also disingenuous, for she chooses to ignore that many lesbians practice penetration and, in fact, are probably better at it than some men given the skill acquired with dildos, fisting, etc.

12. Paul Smith, "Vas," *Camera Obscura*, 17 (Spring 1988): 89-111.

13. Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternburg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana: U of IL, 1988), 48.

14. Incidentally, this work belongs to a microgenre of skateboard porn that also includes Candyland Productions' SEX BOMBS! (1987) and G.B. Jones' THE YO-YO GANG (1992).

15. Happily for those of us curious about the look in the other direction, Aïnouz plans to resuscitate the young Brazilian in a sequel.

16. This issue was first broached by Richard Fung in his tapes ORIENTATIONS (1984) and CHINESE CHARACTERS (1987), and has come up more recently in works such as GOM (1994) by Kirby Hsu and SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR STICKY RICE (1994) by Hong Nguyen.

17. Jessica Benjamin. *The Bonds of Love: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Problem of Domination* (NY: Pantheon, 1988): 73-74.

18. Studlar, 52.

19. I discuss "Those Fluttering Objects of Desire" and other works in the essay "Sexual Hybrids: From Oriental Exotic to Postcolonial Grotesque," *Parachute*, 70 (Autumn 1993).

20. For example, in the Rochester Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival, where I have been a programmer for three years, our programs with titles like "Sexy Shorts for All Sorts" met with such perturbed reactions that in the most recent year we returned to separate "boys" and "girls" erotic programming.

21. Douglas Crimp, "Right on, Girlfriend!" in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed. Michael Warner (Duke University Press, 1993), 12.

22. I would like to thank Douglas Crimp, John Greyson, Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier, and Lyndal Jones, as well as my editors at *Jump Cut*, for their comments and encouragement.

YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF is distributed by Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier, Dept. of Film and Video, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, 721 Broadway, 9th fl, New York, NY 10003-6807. 212-998-1540. RONNIE is distributed by Canyon Cinema, 2325 Third St., ste. 338, San Francisco, CA 94107. (415) 626-2255. "FLESH HISTORIES" and SHRED OF SEX are distributed by Drift, 611 Broadway, ste. 742, New York, NY 10012. (212) 254-4118. PAIXAO NACIONAL is distributed by Karim Ainouz, 12-175 Thompson St., New York, NY 10012. (212) 614-0454. SLANTED VISION is distributed by Video Out, 1102 Homer St., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6B 2X6. (604) 688-4336. "THOSE FLUTTERING OBJECTS OF DESIRE" is distributed by Shu Lea Cheang, 594 Broadway, ste. 908, New York, NY 10012. (212) 777-6912, and in excerpted form by Video Data Bank, 37S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, IL 60603. (312) 345-3550.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

JUMP CUT ON LINE, SORT OF.....

by John Hess, Chuck Kleinhans, Julia Lesage

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The retail price of this issue is \$8.00, reflecting a necessary price increase due to higher paper, printer, and mailing costs. We're also raising subscription prices. For about the past year, realizing that we'd have to hike our prices, we've been spurred to consider some alternatives. In particular, we're evaluating the merits and problems of either producing *Jump Cut* as a totally electronic journal (that is appearing only on line or on digital media such as computer disks) or having an electronic version of it while continuing printed-on-paper publication. We surveyed many of our long-time readers and writers about this, and they overwhelmingly responded that they wanted a *Jump Cut* on paper, one they could hold in their hands. So for a while, at least, we'll continue our conventional publication.

As editors and writers ourselves, we've been putting out *Jump Cut* using computer desktop publishing since the late 80s, and we've conducted a lot of the business of the publication by electronic mail. And we've written articles together by sending drafts back and forth electronically. We're enthused about this new direction and think it offers new possibilities for *Jump Cut*. At the same time, we recognize that it is a new thing for many of our readers and writers. There are numerous considerations, and we want to share our thinking with you. The key concern we have is balancing the availability of *Jump Cut* with the practical aspects of putting it out.

Our basic goals remain the same: to develop radical media criticism; to link media artists, academics, and activists; to develop and extend new areas of criticism. We've always wanted to make the publication widely accessible. We started *Jump Cut* in 1974 with a low-cost, feasible technology (offset tabloid newsprint from typewriter copy). From the start, we've modestly self-subsidized the production of *Jump Cut*. When we've had a bit more extra income, we've put it into areas that would improve the product (such as better quality paper), or we purchased services so we could increase the amount of time we spend editing. However, in the past few years some things have changed. One is that all three of the co-editors now have full time jobs, which limits the amount of time available for *Jump Cut* tasks. Another is that we're experiencing some financial tightening. For a context, you should be aware that our subscription base remains fairly stable, but bookstore sales (in the past always about 2/3-3/4 of our sales) have fallen off due to several factors:

*the loss of small independent bookstores (especially left, feminist, etc.) through chainstore competition; and

*the difficulty of getting display space in highly rationalized chainstore operations where every inch is calculated in terms of short term profit yield.

We are also concerned about:

*sharply increasing prices of paper due to various international trade considerations; and

*a gradual but steady increase in printing and mailing costs.

In the past, we have, given considerable thought to some changes. In the late 70s and early 80s we investigated funding **Jump Cut** substantially through grant money. We decided not to go this route because it seemed editors then occupied much of their time with grant getting rather than editing, and grant income was uncertain, especially if the publication was committed to radical politics. In retrospect, it seems we were right: many grant-dependent parts of the independent art sector have collapsed in the past ten years. For example, **Art Paper** (Minneapolis) folded, and **Afterimage** has shrunk drastically in size and had to reorganize.

Another possibility was to turn the business end of **Jump Cut** over to a university press, as some publications such as **Social Text**, **Socialist Review**, and **Camera Obscura** did in the late 80s and early 90s. What worried us about this approach was that at some point or other it gave final editorial control to a university and thus ultimately to the board of trustees and/or a state legislature. It seemed that given the current political climate, it was unlikely that articles and illustrations that we've run in the past such as those on sexual images, gay porn, safe sex education, and Disney films would be published. (Of course, the new Telecommunications Act attempts to restrict sexual images and all "indecentcy" on the Internet and will result in some kinds of censorship. Although much remains to be settled by the courts.) In the past year, we've had our skepticism confirmed. Many university presses have refused to publish work on Disney by various scholars including art historian David Kunzle (UCLA) specifically because they use images for which Disney Corp. claims it total rights, which it will not grant for academic purposes. Not surprisingly, as faithful servants of the ruling order, university administrators and university lawyers have been unwilling to argue a strong "fair use" copyright case against Disney. In another example of self-censorship, the new anthology by Cory Creekmur and Alex Doty, **Out in Culture** (Duke UP) reprints Tom Waugh's **Jump Cut** piece comparing straight and gay pornography, but without the illustrations in the original.

There are some very positive aspects of changing **Jump Cut** to an electronic publication which would be available: (1) through e-mail subscription (anyone with a computer, modem, and e-mail address would be able to get it), or (2) on the World Wide Web through a homepage (the reader would need access to the Web which now is typically open to people at colleges and universities through computers that are hardwired into the university's mainframe), and (3) possibly on diskettes.

Right now **Jump Cut** is printed on the basis of a process (commercial offset lithography from desktop published layout) in which it is expensive to do the initial set up of creating the plates for the press and setting up the presses. However, once the presses start rolling, a copy's individual cost is minimal. If we shifted to an electronic format, and put it on the World Wide Web, **Jump Cut** could be free to everyone with WWW access. If a reader wanted a paper copy, they could print it out for themselves. If we went primarily electronic, but had some readers who wanted a paper copy, the cost of printing any one page would be relatively small but constant—essentially like laser printing digital material or xeroxing it. Thus, we could put out a copy of **Jump Cut** from the digital material for about the same as xeroxing and binding an issue—this issue would have cost about \$7.00 for one copy plus about \$0.50 for binding, plus mailing costs. So if we had a copy shop make us printed copies for those who wanted them and mail them, an issue might cost about \$12.00 delivered in the U.S.

A. We could still have subscriptions: for sending diskettes, or e-mailing an issue only after receiving

payment. But we've never thought of ***Jump Cut*** as a profit-making entity. So if we eliminated the costs of printing and mailing, we'd have no reason to charge for the publication. ***Jump Cut*** could be free to those who use the Internet (except for costs of user hardware and software and access time). Many of our writers and readers now have some kind of access to the net, and it seems certain that this will continue to increase at a rapid rate. We can assume that many more people, especially students and some people abroad, would read it and have ready access to it. It would also allow the placing of back issues on file. With back issues available online, ***Jump Cut*** could be easily searched for research purposes.

B. We could publish more frequently. At present the burden of layout, printing, and distribution is such that it takes a lot of time. Given our day jobs, it's easier to do layout in one extended push. However, with electronic publication, once an article was in its final form, it could be posted on the Web homepage. (This is now called "preprint" and is widely used in science and medical publishing.) When we decided we had a "full" issue, we would declare it complete and published, and then we'd start another issue of articles-in-waiting. This would give us online publication of reviews and articles based on new films much closer to their release. It would also let us have more current responses to articles and hopefully a more fluid exchange of views. We would remain a refereed, edited publication, not a bulletin board.

C. We could incorporate color still and moving images and sound in articles. This would be easiest through the Web. ***Postmodern Culture*** recently ran an article using close frame analysis by [Robert Kolker](#). Chuck Kleinhans now has an article-in-progress on Northwestern University's Radio/Television/Film Dept. homepage that uses short clips from four films to illustrate points: "Cultural Appropriation and Subcultural Expression: The Dialectics of Cooptation and Resistance": [Postmodern Culture](#) is probably closest to what we imagine ***Jump Cut*** to be: relatively long academic/intellectual articles and reviews. In some fields of science and medicine, electronic journals have an established place.

At the same time, we're see some obvious problems:

A. Not everyone has access to the Web now, and in the future the situation is somewhat uncertain in that parts of it may be privatized. In the U.S. we can expect that most colleges and universities will provide some kind of access to students and faculty. Some public libraries already provide Web access and many provide Internet access. Individuals with their own computers, modems, and ability to purchase line services (such as America Online, Compuserve, etc.) can access the net...but the cost can quickly become prohibitive. If we distributed simply by e-mail, it would be sent to someone's electronic mailbox where they could download it and print out their own copy.

Abroad the situation is uneven. Access is much less likely in developing nations and areas. On the other hand, ***Jump Cut*** has relatively few subscribers in such areas, and we would be able to easily reach people via the net we've never otherwise had contact with (e.g., Eastern Europe). Posting ***Jump Cut*** on the Web would give access to people who could never expect to buy a subscription in U.S. dollars. Given that the prospective readers of ***Jump Cut*** around the world work in media areas, they are among the most likely to gain access to the net.

B. Few people want to read a long article on a screen-thus people would likely have to download it. It would take some time to download a whole issue: less if one is using a high speed line in a university setting, more if one is working with a modem over telephone lines. All this promises to change drastically in the next few years. And time on line costs money, especially for users of commercial online services. And if the issue still had to be printed out, it wouldn't save trees.

C. Because of this, people's style of reading would likely change. Many people would chose to download only those articles that seemed most immediately interesting. And they'd be unlikely then to "discover" an article on a topic they didn't already have an interest in. Browsing ***Jump Cut*** in a bookstore or on library shelves would be a thing of the past. Browsing online would be the norm.

D. We're not sure what this all means to librarians. If **JC** goes electronic, how will people who now find it in their library discover it? Is it important to maintain some kind of printed ***Jump Cut*** for archival or other purposes? Over the past few months, we've asked several/of our writers about participating in a first electronic issue, and some have enthusiastically agreed to do so, while others have had serious reservations. For the moment, we'll be publishing "traditional" issues. In the meantime we will develop our WWW homepage, and perhaps start to put some articles up on the Web as an experiment.

We've been greatly helped in setting it up by Jeremy Butler, the wizard of the net for media folks. Jeremy's [SCREENSITE](#) provides a gateway to many Web and Internet media resources.

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